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THE CAPTAIN ENFORCED HIS ORDER BY ALMOST FORCIBLY EJECTING AHOY ABE AND THE RESCUED GIRL FROM THE CABIN.

Ahoy Abe, THE DOCK SHARP;

OR,

The Parson Sport's Mysterious
Mission.

The Romance of a Shore Cruise for Sea
Sharks.

BY JO PIERCE.

AUTHOR OF "BILLY BLUE BLAZES," "FIFTH
AVENUE FRED," "UNLUCKY JO," "MES-
SENGER 999," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE SHARP BECOMES A LIFE-SAVER.

THE schooner Brown Bet lay in the dock by
one of the North River piers.

A stout boy of seventeen years walked down
on the pier and stood opposite the craft. There
were but few persons in New York who kept a
sharper watch along the water-front, or knew
better what was going on there, than he, but
this vessel had arrived since dark, and the shad-
ows of night prevented him from reading its
name.

A stir on the deck attracted his attention, and
he made out a man and a woman, standing
there.

"Wait a bit, my hearty!" directed the man,
in a deep, low voice, "and I'll throw out the
gang-plank. We'll be ashore in a twinkling."

"I'm almost afraid to go," she answered.
"Nonsense, my girl! It's only a few steps to
the hotel, and it will be light enough as soon as
we are clear of the pier."

He was busy while he spoke, and one end of
the plank was soon shoved out on the pier.

The boy stood near enough to see and hear
all, and, knowing no reason why he should seek
concealment, also near enough so that it seemed
easy for them to see him in return, but he did
not believe they did see him.

The plank having been arranged, the man ad-
ded:

"Go ahead, my girl, and I'll follow as soon as
I get my light jacket. It's right over there."

"I think I'll wait for you."

"But, I'm right at your heels, girl. Don't be
a coward. Go on."

The deep-voiced man spoke impatiently, al-
most angrily, and his directions were obeyed.
The young woman started. She started—but
did not reach the pier. There was a cracking
sound, which plainly came from the plank; a
start and faint cry from her lips; and then the
support parted and she fell downward.

A splash followed, and she was struggling in
the water.

The boy, idly watching, had not expected
anything out of the ordinary current of events,
and least of all what actually had occurred. He
stood inactive for a moment, and then hurried
to the edge of the pier.

The man on the schooner also had advanced
to where he could look, but that was all he did.
He did not move a hand to save her. The other
observer was a cool and practical youth, and
not having a strong enough grasp on intricate
matters to suspect that the man might be
chained to the spot by horror, he cried out in-
dignantly:

"Say, ain't you a-goin' ter help her out of
it?"

The man started and looked at the speaker,
but made no answer, and the boy added:

"She's your chum; why don't you save her
life?"

Then the man stirred into action. Wringing
his hands, he huskily exclaimed:

"Oh! what shall I do? She will be lost!
What shall I do?"

"Can't say, but this is w'ot I'll do."

So saying the dock boy scout cast off his coat
and sprang from the pier. A dip in the North
River was nothing new for him, and he went
with the confidence of a strong swimmer.

He already had seen that the woman could
swim enough to keep afloat, but her failure to
do anything more at this crisis was proof that
she did not have skill enough to save herself,
while her failure to cry out indicated a degree
of fright which showed she would soon perish
unless help was given.

The boy rescuer was soon by her side, and he
passed one arm around her waist.

"Brace up!" he advised, in his off-hand way.

"All you've got ter do is ter keep yer grit, an'
I'll guarantee you'll git out all right. I'll save
yer—great fishes! yes, you bet!"

Then to the man on deck he added:

"Trow us a line, messmate!"

"Yes, yes!" came the answer; "catch it as it
falls. Now, then!"

A rope came circling down, but the cast was
poor, and the end went flying far out of the
rescuer's reach, much to his impatience.

"Don't be so measly nervous!" he advised.
"Try again, an' don't git the idee that this dock
is as big as New York Bay."

Cool as his words were, he was not by any
means having an easy time. The young woman
failed to take in the spirit of his advice to her,
but continued to struggle, and made it by no
means easy to offset her frightened efforts. He
had prevented her from tangling up his arms
by pinioning her own, and this hold he kept
resolutely, though much to her fright.

He determined that if the man on the schooner
continued as wild and erratic as before, he
would strike out for himself and save her, any-
how, but this he was not called upon to do.

Again the rope was flung down, and it fell so
accurately that he grasped it easily. Then it
was the work of only a brief time to form a
noose around the girl's waist.

"Haul away!" he directed, and she was raised
firmly and steadily.

He breathed a sigh of relief when he saw her
landed on deck.

"Now fer me," he directed.

He had grown sufficiently interested to wish
to see more of the couple, and intended to do so.
But no sound came from above, and he sudden-
ly turned, grasped at a support of the pier, and
drew himself to that place. Then, with one
light spring, he landed on the schooner.

The man was bending over the girl.

"Oh! my darling Elise!" he was saying, al-
most sobbingly, "I shall die if harm has come
to you. Oh! my child, my child!"

"Ain't she got her grip yet?"

The man turned upon the speaker sharply.

"Who are you?" he snapped.

"My name is Ahoy Abe, called the Sharp of
the Docks, at yer service; an' I am the gallant-
in' galoot that helped yer a bit ago. Don't bite
my head off!"

"I beg your pardon, young man; I was ner-
vous, excited, alarmed. Otherwise, I should not
have been uncivil. I beg your pardon. But,
oh! my child, my Elise!—is she drowned?"

"I am all right, uncle," came faintly from the
girl.

"Hurrah! Thank Heaven!"

He spoke heartily, and fell to kissing her
hand.

"Carry me to the cabin," she requested.

"I will, at once. Boy, will you help me?"

The youth who had given the eccentric name
of Ahoy Abe was willing, and Elise was lifted
and borne below. A comfortable lounge in the
cabin became her resting-place, and the uncle
bustled around to prepare a hot drink. Abe
scanned both of them curiously.

Elise appeared to be twenty years old, and
was a trim, fine-looking girl, intelligent and
attractive. The uncle was big and strong, with
a thick, short beard and nautical look. It did
not take Abe long to decide that he was the cap-
tain of the Brown Bet.

Ahoy Abe, himself, was worthy of more than
passing attention. He was not handsome, his
features being slightly coarse and his face
freckled, but he was keen, sagacious and good-
natured, and a close observer would at once set
him down as one who "knew the ropes" in New
York, but was not given to ways that were law-
less.

"You had a narrer escape," he observed, to
Elise.

"Words cannot describe the horror of it."

"Guess you don't hev solid gang-planks."

"I can't understand that," cried the captain.

"I've sailed the Brown Bet a good many years,
and some parts of her are a little weak, it may
be, but I would have bet my life on that plank.
It's almost new. It ain't the way of old John
Twiss to have rotten footing."

"Wal, the plank broke."

"Did it?"

"You say."

"I believe some shark stole mine and sub-
stituted his own old one. Can't see how he
could do it, but how else can it be explained?
Here, my poor child; drink this!"

The captain banded over the preparation, and
when Elise had drank it, he added:

"The matter must be looked into. It is no-
thing new to have things about the schooner
monkeyed with when we're in port, but if any-

thing was done to the gang-plank, it was a ne-
trick—and a most villainous one. Are you feel-
ing better, Elise?"

"Yes. Don't worry about me; I shall soon be
all right."

"Then, my lad, let's go up and see if we can
get at this mystery."

They went. Captain Twiss muttered to him-
self as they went, and when, after some labor,
the plank, or its two halves, had been recovered
from the dock basin, he broke out indignantly:

"By the Old Nick! the man who did that was
a scoundrel! Oh! if I only had my paws on
him!"

The exclamation seemed well founded. The
plank had been cut nearly in two with a saw,
only enough being left unsevered to hold it
together; but was not strong enough to hold the
weight of a person.

As a result, Elise had no sooner walked out
on it than it broke and precipitated her into the
water.

"A cowardly trick!" cried Captain Twiss.
"I'll find the one who did it, if it takes a year!"

CHAPTER II.

THE TERROR OF THE CABIN.

THE skipper shook his fist at the empty air,
while Ahoy Abe looked at the severed plank
more quietly, and, presently, murmured:

"Who could 'a' done it?"

He addressed no one but himself, but Captain
Twiss made answer:

"I have business rivals, and it may have been
done by them, but I suppose a more likely pre-
sumption would be that boys were responsible
for it. There are some tough young citizens
along the water-front, and it may be they sawed
the plank for mischief. By the way, are you a
North River boy?"

"Yes; a water-front walker."

"You haven't seen anything wrong?"

"Wrong? Yer mean crooked? Well, no; not
jist here."

"Are you well acquainted hereabouts?"

"Nobody better!" the youth declared.

"Your name is—what?"

"Abraham Dow, commonly called Ahoy
Abe."

"That smacks of the sea."

"The longshoremen and navvies gave me that
handle, ye see. I've sorter mixed in with them
permisc'us. They all know me; the longshore-
men do; an' they named me Ahoy Abe. I used
ter think 'twas a right queer handle, but I've
got used ter it. A name is like a pair o' shoes:
after it's been wore awhile it fits wal, unless
we've got corns. See?"

Twiss regarded Abraham in silence. The
latter had a free-and-easy way which was not
by any means rare among water-front boys,
but he had more: despite the flippancy of his
manner, he was one who "carried an old head
on young shoulder."

"How did you happen to be here?" the captain
asked, after a pause.

"I wuz jest lookin' at the scenery, an' a-
smellin' of it."

"Were you alone?"

"Yes."

"You showed great heroism in plunging into
the water, and I will see you are duly rewarded.
I confess I was paralyzed with horror. What if
the girl had drowned! You see, she is my only
niece, daughter of my late sister, Mrs. Drusilla
Allen."

"We wander from the subjick, mister. How
is it that the sawer of that plank could 'a' done
his job an' not been dropped on by you?" asked
Abe, practically.

"I confess I don't know."

"The plank was on the schooner, eh?"

"Yes."

"Then the sawer wuz there, too."

"What if he is still there?" cried Twiss, with
a sudden start.

"Et ain't likely, but et won't do no hurt ter
look, right away. Ef any sech snoozer is down
there, he may take et inter his head ter bore a
hole through the wessel, or gobble Miss Elise up
like a devourin' wolf an' fly over ter Jersey with
her. That would be tough, yer know!" and
young Abraham winked gravely at his com-
panion, but, in the darkness, it was lost upon the
latter.

Twiss was about to answer, and agree with
the boy as far as searching went, when, sudden-
ly, a shriek sounded from the cabin below. It
was followed by other screams, all indicative of
extreme fright.

"Et's Elise!" Abe declared.

"Great heavens! what is wrong?"

"He's got her! Come on!" and boy bounded
away at full speed. The captain followed with

agility unusual in one of his years. As Abe leaped down the companionway, some one ran into him violently, and he tried to square away for self-defense, but calmed down when he saw it was Elise, herself.

"Hoppin' Neptune! wot's up?" he demanded.

He looked around the cabin for an explanation of her fright, but failed to see any cause. Captain Twiss's ruddy face was the picture of vague alarm.

"Elise! Elise!" he cried, "what is it?"

Elise did not answer, but remained in the arms of her two friends, crying out hysterically.

"Land, land!" exclaimed the captain, "what can it be, now?"

"She's scared out o' her wits," Abe returned, "an' it follers she's seen something out o' the ord'nary course. Somebody must be here."

Twiss at once became more alert and began to look around sharply, but Elise extended her hand, pointed and explained:

"In there!"

"My cabin!" added Twiss, sharply. "What is there? Who is there?"

But the girl dropped into a chair, and sat there, shivering and silent. Then the captain moved quickly forward, determined to solve the mystery. Abe followed close after him. Twiss flung open the half-closed door.

The master of the Brown Bet was a man who liked comfort. His private quarters showed this. The room was larger than was to be expected, and well fitted up.

Against the wall, opposite his berth, was a table. Ordinarily it was used for commonplace purposes, but not now. Ahoy Abe, looking over the sailor's shoulder, saw a strange sight—a sight so out of the usual order of events, and so uncanny, that no one would have looked for its like in modern New York, or been ready to believe that such a sight was there to be seen were the evidence anything less than that of his own vision.

Three human skeletons were there!

"Gods!" muttered John Twiss.

Ahoy Abe said nothing, but he looked quite as attentively as the captain.

Three skeletons in the cabin! Strange spectacle!

Of the dead trio one was standing, and the other two seated at the table! Each of the latter held playing-cards in his bony left hand, and other cards were on the table. It was a weird representation of a genuine game, and the blue, red and white chips showed the precise nature of the game.

Mechanically Abe scanned the cards held by the relic of humanity next to him. He saw four queens and an ace of diamonds in the skeleton hand.

But, there was something more striking. Back of this player was the standing skeleton. The latter's head was bent forward, as if he, too, was scanning those cards, while in the bony fingers of his right hand he clutched an uplifted dagger.

Ahoy Abe read the story quickly; the man with the knife was about to stab in the back the man who held the four queens—at least, such would have been the inference had the players been living now.

Had the scene some time really occurred?

The dock shadower mutely asked the question, and was eager to see more, but Captain Twiss, arousing from the spell which was upon him, uttered a discordant cry.

"Come away!" he ordered, seizing Abe by the arm. "This is the devil's work; it is no place for us. Come away!" and before the boy could remonstrate he was pushed aside, and all were again in the main cabin.

The captain's bronzed face had grown pale, and he trembled perceptibly.

"That's a queer show you keep," remarked Abe, coolly. "Beats any Bowery museum layout I've seen. Still, ain't t an odd ornament fer yer parlor?"

"It's no work of mine," groaned Twiss; "it's a part of the same villainous scheme that did the other work. I'd give a pile of money to get my grip on whoever did it."

"Say, mister, why was it done?"

"Why? The fiends who did it only know."

"Must 'a' been some objack in it, I should say."

"It was a low joke."

"Mighty queer kind of a joke, b'gosh! Somebody had ter rob a graveyard an' fix things up— Say, let's go in an' take another look at the show."

Abe's curiosity was all aroused, and he pushed past Twiss and reentered the place of mystery. He advanced to the table and gazed in wonder

at the weird card-players. He saw that the skeletons were held together by wires, and that the same means had been used to keep each in place, some of the wires being fastened to the ceiling.

Twiss hurriedly gathered up all of the cards, including those held by the bony hands, and tossed them aside. Then he wiped his forehead nervously.

"This is an awful affair!" he declared.

"Some o' yer crew must hev been in it, eh? No outsider could 'a' fixed the game up, seems ter me; you'd hev seen 'em around."

"The schooner has been poorly guarded. We had no cargo to watch, and I sent the boys out to enjoy themselves. Thus, an outsider could—and did—come here and work the game. There is nothing strange about that, but what certainly is marvelously strange is, who did it, and why was it done?"

Abe looked at the silent card-players. He thought of the difficulty an ordinary person would have to get three skeletons; of the preliminary study and final labor necessary to arrange such a pantomime; and he considered the tableau before him.

All this indicated more than an idle jest. The tableau had some deeper meaning than a mere joke.

Meaning for whom unless for John Twiss? Why should the group be in the captain's private cabin unless its secret affected him?

A wave of suspicion passed to the boy's mind, and he turned his gaze upon his companion. John Twiss was frightened. The color had not returned to his face, and his big hands trembled. A man who saw only a poor joke in the matter might be indignant, or he might laugh, but frightened—never!

"Hullo, my bold eagle o' the sea!" thought the water-front gamin, "you ain't the spotless dove you claim ter be. The feathers in yer crest look very buzzard-like. Does this scene call up old memories? Ef so, wot memories? That's jist wot Abraham is bound to know."

Without breathing his new ideas, he looked again at the figure with the knife.

"I wonder," he added, aloud, "ef ever a card-player was stabbed in the back, ez this lay-out seems ter indicate?"

Twiss started.

"No, no; of course not," he returned, hurriedly. "Why did you think of such an absurd thing?"

"That's the game the skeleton-knifer seems about ter try."

"All nonsense, of course; all nonsense."

"Mebbe! Say, this man held four queens an' an ace; a pretty fair hand as poker-hands go. Wot did the other feller hold?"

"I don't know."

"You ought ter looked. Et kinder dawns onter me that ef Number One hadn't held four of a kind he might not 'a' been stabbed in the back. Eh?"

"Pshaw! pshaw!" cried John Twiss, impatiently. "You are too imaginative. Of course this farce means nothing at all."

Elise Allen appeared in the door.

CHAPTER III.

A HOUSE OF SECRETS.

ELISE had grown calm. She was not of a cowardly nature, but just the reverse. Still, her nerves had been upset by her own narrow escape from death, and when she saw the unnatural group in the cabin she had yielded to actual terror.

Now she gave little sign of outward perturbation. She looked curiously at the trio.

"Uncle Twiss, what does this mean?" she asked.

"A boys' joke; a boys' joke!" was his impatient response. "You don't know these strange city youth as I do. They are up to all kinds of tricks, and care not upon whom they vent their fancy for so-called amusement. There, there; let us give it no more attention. Let's go out!"

He made a move toward the main cabin, but Elise did not retreat.

"It's hard to regard it as a mere joke," she remarked, gravely.

"Miss," interrupted Ahoy Abe, "did you ever know anybody as was stabbed in the back like that?"

He pointed to the third figure, but Captain Twiss broke forth angrily:

"Have done with your imaginative nonsense! I will not listen to anything more! I command you not to say another word. You may have been in this plot!"

"Ef any plotter is nigh, et ain't me," returned the Sharp of the Docks, severely.

"I cannot see," continued Elise, "why any one should arrange such a strange, elaborate scene out of any commonplace motive. To me it looks as if it meant something, and—it was in your cabin, uncle!"

"We will not speculate on possibilities that don't exist," decided Twiss, roughly. "These bones I will bundle together and drop in the river; we have made too much of them already. Come, now, go out!"

The captain enforced his order by almost forcibly ejecting Ahoy Abe and the rescued girl from the inner cabin, and he then turned the key of the door and locked the skeleton trio in.

"The hour grows late," he remarked, yawning. "Boy, I think it time to close up shop, so to speak, and get some sleep. You can leave us now. We are greatly obliged to you for helping Elise out of the dock, and if you'll call around to-morrow, I will still further testify my gratitude."

Elise put both her hands on Abe's shoulders.

"You are a brave, noble youth!" she declared, "and words cannot repay you for all you have done. Come to-morrow, for I wish to talk with you."

"Oh! it wa'n't notain' ter pull yer out o' the drink, miss, an' I'd been a weak sister ef I couldn't 'a' done it, but ez fer comin' ter call on yer, why, great Scott! et will suit me like a quail on toast, you bet! I'll come!"

Abraham nodded with emphasis. He knew a pretty girl when he saw one, and Elise just about fitted his idea of the species.

He would have been glad to call, anyhow, while, after the events just recorded, there was the magnet of mystery to urge him to keep track of uncle and niece.

Twiss escorted him to the dock, and Abe then walked away.

"Ez funny an experience ez I ever struck along the old North River," he muttered, as he went. "Can't see the whys an' wherefores, but I'm jest ez sure that skeleton wax-work biz had a meanin' ez that fleas means dogs around somewhere. Sure!"

Another idea was prominent in his mind, and that was that Captain Twiss did not please him. The mariner's strange conduct from the time he had stood on the deck and seen Elise struggle in the water without making a move to aid her, down to the present time, all occurred to him, and he shook his head.

"Cap'n Jack may be an angel in sailor's tog, but I don't believe et. I'll find out wot that card-playing skeleton sociable means, or rip the uppers off o' my cowhides in tryin'! That's me!"

Meditating thus he was proceeding along West street when, as he reached the foot of an incoming street, a voice suddenly called out:

"Hullo, young fellow!"

Abe looked and saw a tall man who had just stepped out of a recess.

"Hullo, Parson Joe!" he quickly returned.

"You know me, do you?"

"You bet!"

"And, I dare say, know no good of me," added Parson Joe, with a grave smile.

Abe ran his hands into his pockets and squared himself away with his shoulders well back.

"They do say, Joseph, you are a rare specimen."

"In what way?"

"'Cause you're a square 'sport.'"

"To admit that I was an oddity for that reason would be to cast doubt on other sports."

"They kin bear it, 'cause the cap fits. I ain't so old as Methuselah was afore he died, but I've paddled around in blessed ol' New York a good bit sence my legs got muskular enough ter manage my body, an' I don't know no good o' sports, in general. They live solely ter gamble, play the races, mash actresses an' imbibe beer."

"Not a manly way of living, I admit."

"Et wouldn't be so bad ef they was square, but they ain't, an' that's where you lay 'em over. Parson Joe, they call yer. That's partly because you always dress in sober black, an' partly, I guess, 'cause you are square."

The sport made a hurried gesture.

"Don't let us speak of myself. Think of me as one like other sports—a most despicable class. Don't think well of me! Have you lately seen Old Grasshopper?"

"The 'longshoreman'?"

"I think that is his calling; anyhow I've seen you with him."

"Grassey is a 'longshoreman, an' I know him. Fer that matter I know all the 'longshoremen' o' the North River. Wot about Grassey?"

"I want to find him."

"Wal, I ain't seen him ter-night."

Parson Joe stood in thoughtful silence, while Abe as thoughtfully studied Joe. As the former had said, the sport dressed in black. Had it not been for his barely visible linen there would have been nothing to break the one prominent hue of his costume.

His rather fine face was without beard, but the daily use of a razor upon it did not keep it from having the dark line which showed where a beard would soon appear, if allowed to grow.

This man was somewhat of a curiosity. He was not popular with sporting men as a rule, and many wholly distrusted him, but no one could give good ground for a doubt. His gravity was against him. No one knew anything more. And when he wagered anything on chance, at the card-table or the races, he was a reckless "plunger."

Some observing men had ventured the opinion that Joe had seen some great trouble, basing the idea on the fact that his face was rarely free from a look of sadness, but no amount of inquiry ever had developed the mystery of his past life, if there was one.

He suddenly aroused from meditation.

"Boy, do you want to do an errand?" he asked.

"I'm always open ter negotiations," Ahoy Abe replied.

"You will be duly paid, and the service is, on the surface, simple. It is to carry a note to a certain house. What I particularly want you to do, however, is to use judgment which cannot be estimated in cash. See?"

"Jedgment in w'ot, mister."

"I want you to keep your eyes wide open, see all you can see, and hear all you can hear. Imagine, if you please, that the house is one which has a secret, and be on the alert to notice all out of the common order of events. Also, watch closely when the note is read, and see how it affects the reader."

"No skin-game about it, is there, boss?"

"None whatever."

"Then I'm yer gorilla. Speed the plow!"

"The house is No. —, West street, and the man is Peter Glass."

"The horse 'tout?"

"Yes. So you know him?" replied the waterfront walker.

"By sight an' repertation. I don't number no tout among my friends, fer I ain't in love with that sort of biped. Not much! But there ain't nothin' ter pervert me from carryin' yer note, mister. Pete may, or may not, know me by sight—et don't matter whether he does or not."

"Here is the note, then. Go, be prudent and wise, and you shall be duly rewarded. Give the note to Glass, in person."

"Right you be, boss!"

Abraham was accustomed to doing errands where little light was vouchsafed him, and he received the note nonchalantly and moved away.

On gaining sight of the house he found it one of more size than was the rule in that vicinity. The lower part was used for business purposes, and the upper as a dwelling. He rung the bell, and a run-down looking specimen of mankind appeared.

Abe asked for Glass, and was informed that he was out. The messenger observed that he would enter and wait, whereupon the woman hesitated, scrutinizing the Dock Sharp closely. She conducted him up-stairs to a sitting-room.

"Wait here," she directed, briefly, and went out.

Abe was obeying Parson Joe's orders to observe all he could. He had noted her hesitation to admit him. The fact that she had now left him alone proved that she had not been afraid to admit him. Then why had she hesitated?

"Pete Glass is a sneak, an' he's prob'ly a scamp," thought the messenger. "Et wouldn't surprise me a bit ef this house was a crook's quarters."

Presently Abe heard two persons come down the second flight of stairs. They began to speak, and their voices not only showed them to be women, but, unknown to them, reached the Sharp's sharp ears.

"He is mighty troublesome," remarked one.

"Yes," returned the other. "He is gaining strength every day, an' ef I had my way, I'd poison him. Pete Glass is a fool if he continues to run resk here. Why not move him away?"

"Oh! Pete wants Captain Twiss's money."

"Hello! Do these cases connect?" was Abe's ready query.

"One of these days Pete an' Twiss will go to

Sing Sing, an' then they'll wish they had kept out of it. Now that gal, Eliza, or Elise, or w'otever her name is, will make trouble; women always do."

"It's a big lay."

"Yes, but will it pay? Now, that thing up-stairs—Hark! what's that?"

A crash had sounded on the floor above, followed by a discordant sound like that of neither human being nor animal.

"Murder!" one of the women cried; "he's got loose!"

"What has got loose?" wondered Abe, as a fresh screech followed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHARP LEAVES TELLTALE SIGNS.

AHOY ABE was on his feet. He was ready to believe anything evil of the house, and did not place any charitable construction on what he had heard said, while the reference to Captain Twiss and Elise showed that the affairs of Peter Glass dovetailed with those of the mariner and his niece in some way.

But that strange sound from above—what was it? That was what interested the Dock Sharp most. He did not believe man or beast had uttered the discordant cry—then what was it?

He heard the women running up-stairs together, and a sudden reckless resolve came to him. Risky as it was, he determined to tread the same course and see if he could obtain light on the subject.

Quickly leaving the room, he hurried up the stairs. The hall above was vacant, but he was not at a loss to ascertain where the women were.

Sounds of a struggle came from a room near at hand. He ran to the closed door.

"Beat him back!" came the cry, in a woman's voice.

"Look out for his teeth!" responded the second female.

"Crack his head if he touches you!"

Then sounded the discordant noise again, and even his proximity gave Abe no information. It was unlike anything he had heard before.

The struggle continued, but, whatever the opposing force was, its originator gave no further clew to his species.

Still, the listener could not help arriving at two conclusions; that it must be an animate object, and that anything less than a human being could not figure so prominently.

Again his curiosity urged him on to reckless work, and he attempted to open the door. Here he was foiled; it was locked.

The struggle ceased inside, and only heavy breathing was heard for awhile. Then one of the women angrily exclaimed:

"I've a good mind to pound him over the head!"

"Leave that for Glass and Twiss."

"They leave this demon to us; why shouldn't we manage him? It is nothin' but trouble, with the fear of the perleece always afore our eyes. Let them get wind of this, an' descend onto us, an' where would we go? Why, we'd be railroaded! Pretty place, Sing Sing is, but I don't aspire to go there fer twenty years."

"Must be bloody work goin' on up here," thought Ahoy Abe.

"I'll stay here," pursued one of the women, "an' you go down. Glass will soon be in, an' you want ter tell him of the boy. Yes; an' to watch the boy, too. I'm afraid of that kid; he looks too sharp to be trusted."

Ahoy Abe grimaced and turned away from the door. There was no further chance to learn anything, and prudence demanded that he get back to where he had been left, without delay.

At that moment, however, he made an alarming discovery. Footsteps sounded on the stairs below, and he saw a man ascending. Another look, and he recognized Peter Glass, himself.

"Jehosophat!"

The Sharp uttered the exclamation in a startled way. He was literally cornered, and discovery seemed certain. What was to be done? He felt no cowardly fear of Glass, but it would be an awkward situation if he was found there.

Again he asked the mental question, What was to be done?

He flashed a glance around the hall. Near him was another door. He seized the knob and turned it—it yielded—a closet was revealed beyond.

Quickly he entered.

It seemed to be only a reprieve, but anything was better than stupid acquiescence in the dan-

ger of immediate discovery. He peered out and saw Glass at the top of the last stairs.

As if in defiance of his name the man was anything but fragile. He was big, burly, coarse, dirty and unkempt. He had a face as brutal as a prize-fighter's, and almost as rough as corrugated pasteboard. An ill-looking person was Peter Glass, horse tout and tough.

Just as he planted one of his big feet on the floor, the hitherto-locked door opened, and one of the women appeared. She looked relieved upon seeing Peter.

"I'm glad you've come!" she declared. "The deuce has been to pay, here!"

"With his nibs?" demanded Glass, quickly.

"Yes. He got partly loose, and we had ter fight him shoulder to shoulder. I tell ye, that critter is dangerous. He knows too much; his head is too long. I've held ducks before, but not one whose brain worked as actively as his. One of these days, Peter, he will get wholly loose, an' then there will be the tallest kind of a row. See?"

"You are excited, Deb," Glass returned. "Of course he was liable to get a partial move on, but if he was a Samson he couldn't get wholly free. Don't you worry."

"Well, ef you're the man you claim, come in and tie them knots so they'll hold."

"All right."

Peter entered the room of mystery with her, and again the key clicked in the lock. By that time Abe Dqw was in the hall with his gaze fixed on the door. His daring was such that he was ready to take any risk to see beyond that door, and he had decided to risk the venture, but the turning of the key settled that point.

Giving the matter up for the time, he retreated down-stairs and to the room where he had been left originally. He felt sure he would soon see some of the gang, and was not disappointed. Quick, heavy footsteps sounded, and Glass entered.

He regarded Abe suspiciously, it seemed.

"I'm told that you want to see me," he began.

"I do, general. I hev an epistolary document, surnamed a letter, here, which is fer yer perooal. Them female women wanted fer ter relieve me of it, but I had strick orders ter dump it inter yer own fives, an', besides, I ain't no great faith in women."

"Give me the letter."

"Correck, fer sure."

Abraham was as bland and smiling as boy could be, and Pete's frown disappeared to a great degree. But when he read the letter it all came back, and he glared angrily at the messenger.

"Why in perdition was this sent me?" he demanded, belligerently.

"Don't know, mister."

"I wish I had the scoundrel here who wrote it."

"You kin send fer him," suggested Abe.

"I suppose you are in it?"

"In w'ot?"

"The bluff."

"Nary in, boss. W'ot is the rifle?"

Pete's manner changed.

"Haven't you read this note?"

"No," replied the Sharp; and then he felt sorry he had admitted the fact.

"How came you by it?"

"Met a gent on the street who hifed me ter bring it. I may say he was an unknown, fer he didn't whisper his name in my ear. See?"

Glass thought he did, and decided that Ahoy Abe was only an innocent hired man. He fell to studying the note, and the messenger saw that he was stirred up all through. Anger, and perhaps alarm, gnawed at his heartstrings and photographed themselves on his face.

He was still studying when one of the women entered the room. She held a handkerchief in her hand, and extended it toward Glass.

"Is that yours?" she asked.

"No," he answered, contemptuously. "I don't carry a 'wipe' that has more dirt on it than West street can boast of."

"Then it's that boy's!"

The woman turned two hostile eyes upon "that boy," who felt that he would like a hole to crawl into. The soiled handkerchief was indeed his, and he began to fear it had led him into shallow waters and breakers.

"I found it on the floor in the upper hall," the hostile female added, "an' ef it ain't yours, no inmate of this house dropped it there. That boy has been spyin' on us!"

CHAPTER V.

ABE MEETS DANGER AND MYSTERY.

LEVELING a bony finger at Ahoy Abe, the woman poured out the accusation, and it was

the more painful for him that he realized he must have lost it exactly as she said. In some way it had fallen from his pocket when he was in the upper hall.

"I told you, Pete," she added, "that I thought I heard some one mousin' in the hall."

Despite the directness of the accusation, the object thereof preserved his composure remarkably. He eyed the handkerchief disdainfully.

"I plead not guilty," he asserted. "I never owned no wipe, anyhow. Don't see no need o' sech a thing. Would as soon think of sleepin' in a night-gown, like them Fifth Avenue dudes. Even if I owned a handkerchief, I wouldn't use it ter wipe up all the mud in Jersey, ez some one hez done ter that. See?"

The nonchalant denial went for nothing.

"Don't you b'lieve him, Glass," urged the beligerent female. "He is lyin'!"

"Mebbe you know my wardrobe better than I do, mum."

"I know you dropped this."

"Gammon!"

"I am compelled to believe this woman's conclusion is correct. Boy, why were you skulking in the hall?"

Peter's manner grew more threatening, but he was not rewarded by any signs of fear on Abe's part. In fact, it was not natural to the Sharp to be afraid. He knew Glass was a tricky fellow who lived by his wits, and did not doubt that he was capable of any additional evil work, but the messenger did not quail.

"Now, you see here," he returned, "I ain't goin' ter make any more palaver about this. I've told you I ain't guilty, an' I don't waste no words on a feller who casts doubts on my veracity. You kin believe me, or you kin go to thunder! See?"

"Pete," advised the woman, "don't you let him leave here until he gives a good account of himself."

"I won't, you bet!"

"Hey? W'ot's that?" Abe demanded.

"You are a prisoner."

"Oh! come off!"

"A person who comes into my house and skulks around as you have done, puts himself liable to any punishment I see fit to give—"

"You can't punish me!"

"No?"

"Not by a darned sight, mister! You may run this tumble-down old shanty, but you don't run me; no, nor you can't. Hev you any answer ter make to that epistle?"

"No."

"Then I'm goin'."

The Sharp moved resolutely toward the door, but it was in the nature of an experiment and, as he would have expressed it, a "bluff." Glass and the woman stood in the way, and he well knew he could not pass them if they saw fit to block his path.

Keenly observant, he now saw that Pete hesitated.

"If you can clear yourself, you can go," the tout remarked, slowly.

"I'm goin', anyhow. I'm a free-born American citizen, I be; an' nobody kin hold me up like a Nor'west road-agent. Ef a hand is laid on me I always yell so like sin that every cop in New York kin hear me."

"Were you really in the upper hall? If so, why? Tell me the truth, and—"

"Of course he was there!" cried the woman. "Will you let that little fool humbug ye?"

Practical as she was, Glass hesitated to take the decisive step. He was not troubled with a conscience, but the seizing and holding of a prisoner meant a risk he did not want to take if he could help it, and, besides, he had no good place to put the Sharp.

Troubled, doubtful, and not a little confused, he stepped out of the way.

"You can go," he muttered, "but, remember, I rely on your honor."

"Well, Pete Glass, you are a fool!" the woman declared.

But Abe promptly passed the couple, and, now being on the safe side, nodded genially.

"I felt sure from the look o' yer honest face you wouldn't go fer ter harm a poor orphim," he remarked, with quiet humor. "My father an' mother both died ten years afore I wuz born, an' left me alone in the world. I depend on worthy gents like yer nibsey ter do the han'-some by me."

By that time he had the street-door open, and he bowed deeply as he added:

"Ef I shouldn't recognize ye when we meet ag'in, jest call me by name, fer I'd hate ter give up sech pleasant 'quaintances. So-long, gents an' maidens fair!"

He winked to the woman, who was neither fair nor a maiden, and went coolly down the stoop. Glass and the woman gazed after him with doubt and fear which, on her part, finally found expression in the vehement assertion:

"Pete Glass, you're a fool!"

"Maybe I am," he gloomily admitted.

"I kin see with half an eye that kid is one of Satan's own chicks. He will be around an' do you up. He spied on you in the hall, an' who knows how much he discovered about the mystery of that room?"

Her voice sunk to a dramatic whisper, and Glass moved uneasily.

"I hope you are wrong, Dore; I hope he was not in the upper hall."

"He was," Dore insisted; "he was there, an' he will do you up. When you're done fer, remember you was warned by a woman; an' it's the women who hev long heads."

"Long ears, you mean," Pete retorted. "Bosh, Dorecas, bosh!—you imagine too much. I'll report to Captain Twiss, but I don't fancy there is any trouble whatever. Don't be croaking!"

And he closed the door.

In the mean while Abe walked on until he met Parson Joe. He had some doubt of being able to find the sport, he had been gone so long, but the man in black was waiting, his serious face calm and patient.

"Well?" he questioned, quietly.

"No answer, mister."

"No?"

"Nary! Peter China-ware Glass didn't seem ter take the missive kindly, an' all my eloquence couldn't worm no answer out o' him."

"What did he say?"

Abe told as near as he could all that had been said on the subject, and also dwelt upon the tout's facial expression. Parson Joe heard in serious meditation.

"I may have made a mistake in writing to Glass," he remarked. "I am a good deal in the dark, and it's possible I have put my foot in it."

"General, w'ot fer a place is that old ark, anyhow?"

"I don't know."

"W'ot's the thing up-stairs that yowls, screeches, sneezes, coughs an' screams, all in one breath?"

"What do you mean?"

Ahoy Abe had great confidence in this remarkable sport who was "square," and he proceeded to tell the rest of his experience in the West street house.

He did not fail to do full justice to the mystery of the upper room, and Parson Joe looked very much puzzled.

"What do you suppose it was?"

"I dunno," Abe confessed.

"If they call it 'he,' the object must be some living creature, and it hardly seems that it can be an animal."

"Et wasn't no animal. It's cry was as peculiar as the ways of a ward politician in New York, but I've seen enough o' animals ter be sure this wasn't one."

"Then it's a man."

"Looks like it."

"A man held prisoner."

"Gosh-ter-blazes! but Glass must be a corker!"

"If he really has a man there as a prisoner, it may be a matter that interests me. I say it 'may be,' for I am on a trail where all is doubt and uncertainty. You say you know the 'longshoreman' called Old Grasshopper. As I explained to you when we first met, I want to find that man. Now, can't you suggest some way for me to get at him to-night?"

"Wal, we might go to Patsey Breen's place," Abe returned, meditatively. "The 'longshoremen' make a practice of droppin' in ter Patsey's ter drink beer. Old Grasshopper may be there, an' he may not; but ef he ain't, we may find out where he lives."

"A capital idea. Let us try it."

Abe led the way to Patsey's. This was a place which had a saloon in front, and a big place called a reading-room at the rear. Really, there was but little reading done there. Patsey ordered the daily and illustrated papers, but did not "keep" them, for the good reason that, before nightfall, dishonest customers had stolen about the whole lot. In former years Abe had been an errand-boy for Patsey more than once, and he still had the privilege of going and coming when he pleased.

Entering the side-door, and thereby avoiding the bar-room, Abe and Parson Joe reached the reading-room.

A score of 'longshoremen' were present: big,

muscular men who, in a time of emergency, could be counted upon as the very flower of New York's people, as far as strength and hardy resolution went.

The Dock Sharp selected one whom he knew and inquired for Old Grasshopper. That member of their fraternity had not been seen that evening.

"Where does he live?" Abe next asked.

"Now you're hootin'!" remarked one of the pier gladiators. "Where does he live? Anybody know?"

No one answered.

"I'll treat the feller who knows," pursued the speaker. "I've worked shoulder ter shoulder with Old Grasshopper fer five years, when he sees fit ter work, but I know no more about him than I do about the McGinty. Old Grassey is a myst'ry, he is. Whar does he live? W'ot does he do o' nights? I reckon it would make interestin' matter ter know."

"He's a corker."

"I never understood him."

"Do you think he's a crook?"

"W'ot is his secret?"

"He's a darned queer one."

The 'longshoremen' near at hand expressed their views freely as far as they had any, in the above and other words, but not one of them claimed any real knowledge of Old Grasshopper. He was a man who came and went among them, saying but little, and suggesting, by his reserve and strange ways, a good deal more than they could grasp fully.

Finding that nothing was to be learned about him, the inquirers were about to abandon the quest for the night when a fresh arrival pushed his way through the crowd.

He wore a sailor's outfit, and had evidently been using, and misusing, his leave of absence. He walked unsteadily, and his eyes had a glassy aspect which was not due to any mild drink.

He flung his cap down on a table.

"Messmates," he cried, "my name is Jack Turner, an' I belong ter the schooner Brown Bet," he announced.

"Well, you'd better go back ter yer schooner, or you'll get your head punched," suggested a 'longshoreman, irritated by the sailor's over-forward manner.

"I don't think so. I'm a peaceful man, an', not anxious fer a row with anybody. I'd run before I'd fight, but would rather drink yer good health than ter run. Let us hev peace! I'm a Jack Tar ashore, an' I hope nobody envies me a few hours in the most glorious city of the world, old New York."

The speaker's manner was so good-humored that all resentment fled, and somebody placed a chair for him.

"So your ship is in port, is it?"

"Right, messmate; schooner Brown Bet; John Twiss, cap'n. Lord bless you! but he's a corker; generally as stiff as a sea-breeze. W'ot struck him this voyage I don't know. Usually had as soon eat belayin'-pins as ter give the boys an hour on shore, but this night he packed the whole lot of us off, without askin' ef we was willin'; almost drove us away."

Ahoy Abe heard with more interest than any other person present. All his doubts of the master of the Brown Bet returned.

Why had Twiss been so anxious to get rid of his crew on this particular night?

"A drunken chatterbox," remarked Parson Joe; "I think we may as well go."

But at that moment one of the 'longshoremen' touched Abe's arm and remarked:

"Here comes Old Grasshopper!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE SQUARE SPORT'S OBJECT.

"AHA! our man, at last!"

Ahoy Abe nudged Parson Joe sharply and nodded toward the door. The latter did not need to ask which was Old Grasshopper. A man was advancing who was so out of the ordinary run of men that no one who had heard of Old Grasshopper need be in doubt.

He was of middle age and very strongly built. His shoulders were broad; his arms long and powerful. Yet, he was not a well-formed man. His shoulders rose very high, making a hollow between them in which rested his short neck and big head; and his long, mishapen legs were almost crooked enough to make his nickname excusable.

His face was broad, and very perceptible signs of intelligence of no mean degree would have made it an attractive face were it not for an over-cunning and furtive something about it.

Abraham spoke to him with the freedom the

eccentric boy always showed to all he addressed.

"Hey, Nibsey; come here, will yer?"

Old Grasshopper looked, but did not obey.

"Say, be you deaf, gineral?"

It was so evident that the deformed 'longshoreman intended wholly to disregard the address that Parson Joe rose and spoke in his customary dignified way.

"I beg your pardon, sir; but can I speak with you?"

Old Grasshopper paused and looked up into the face of the sport. A close observer would have said that he found something there of far more than passing interest, for he seemed to lose sight of the question in gazing at the questioner. Suddenly he aroused with a slight start.

"Certainly, sir; certainly."

"Your name, I believe, is—is—"

"Old Grasshopper."

The sport had hesitated to speak the uncomplimentary sobriquet, but the 'longshoreman gave it without the least sign of annoyance.

"You are the gentleman I wish—"

"Never mind the polite palaver; I'm Old Grasshopper, 'longshoreman. Call me that, an' leave off the flourishes. What do you want?"

The question was straight to the point, and Parson Joe answered:

"Do you know a man named Peter Glass?"

"I may."

"I am referred to you for information concerning him."

"Why don't you go to him?"

"I would like to get my pointers in some other way—in brief, of you."

"Well, what is it?"

"Do you know the man?" Joe repeated, impatiently.

"Yes; by sight."

"What do you know of him?"

"No good. He is to you what a jackal is to a lion," bluntly explained Old Grasshopper. "The jackal eats the meat the lion leaves, after the latter has killed his prey, you know. Glass could not exactly be called a sport, though he hauls in his living out of the dregs, and by doing the dirty work of sport, so called. He is a horse-tout, a fleecer of the ignorant, and about everything that is low and mean."

"All this I know; but what of the man as a private citizen?" Joe asked.

"Don't know."

"It must be that you do know, and I have enough faith in your dislike of him to speak out frankly. Am I not safe in doing it?"

The 'longshoreman's keen gaze became keener, as he evidently tried to read the sport's mind. Then he promptly returned:

"Yes. Say on!"

"Some time ago," began Parson Joe, "I happened on a man down on Long Island who was dying. He was one of the many New York men who have been wrecked by a passion for the races. He was middle-aged, and held a fairly good position, where he handled his employer's money, fully trusted."

"He had been playing the races for some time, and the thirst grew so maddening that he had taken the firm's money to follow his passion. Always losing, he had got into a deep hole. He then misappropriated a large sum, determined to retrieve his losses or break on the wheel."

"He again lost!"

"He did not return home, but, worrying himself ill, was dying among strangers when I found him. What he said to me need not be told in full; I will only relate a part."

"This poor wreck told me of a man named Peter Glass, who had cruelly wronged another man named Hiram Bentley. The latter was a gentleman, and far removed in all ways that were noble from the wretched horse tout and blackleg."

"My informant had aided Glass slightly without having any clear idea of what the game was, and never suspecting the villainy that was afoot. He never did learn just what it was, but gained enough information to be aware that Glass had not only been able to seize upon Bentley's money, but had wrecked the latter's life."

"Dying, he was more miserable than ever over the matter, and he exacted from me a promise that I would investigate and try to right the wrong."

"He managed to write a note to Glass which expressed just enough to put the latter on the defensive, though it was ostensibly to recommend me as a man who would like to help Glass, for pay."

"He had but a vague idea of the man, and

he referred me to you, sir, as one who was likely to know a good deal about Glass."

Parson Joe ceased and looked inquiringly at Old Grasshopper.

"What do you expect to do?" the 'longshoreman demanded, brusquely.

"First of all, learn just what crime Glass committed against Bentley."

"Are you going to ask him?"

"I did have an idea of doing this, if other means failed."

"He probably would confess," was the dry comment.

"That is not it; I was going to try and bluff him."

"What do you want of me?"

"Did you ever hear of Bentley?"

"No."

"Do you know enough of the tout's ways to be able to put me on the track?"

Old Grasshopper was curt to the degree of incivility, but Parson Joe's patience seemed to have impressed him at last. He assumed a thoughtful air, and somewhat more amiably answered:

"At present I know nothing, but it may be I can learn something by investigation. This is a matter that don't concern me, and I don't know why I should trouble myself about it; but," he added, with a peculiar curl of the lips, "I am a man who likes to oblige. I will make inquiries and see what I can learn."

Ahoy Abe felt that this was not a promise given in sincerity, but the sport's face showed no signs of disappointment. He seriously replied:

"Do so, if you please, and remember I stand ready to reciprocate the favor in any way you may name. I'll give you my address, and hope to hear from you as soon as you learn anything."

Due arrangements were made, and then Parson Joe nodded to Abe, and they left the 'longshoreman's resort. They went a block in silence, with the sport engaged in deep meditation. Suddenly he remarked:

"This seems to have been time thrown away."

"Why so, mister?"

"Old Grasshopper has not panned out well. He has not been sincere, or tried to help me. Is he honest, in a general way?"

"I never heard otherwise."

He played with me, cat-and-mouse fashion. I hope nothing from him. In fact, I have an idea that he knows far more about this case than he dares tell."

Abe nodded his satisfaction; it pleased him to see that Joe was not to be deceived.

"I hope you'll learn all, mister," he declared.

"Is that man really a 'longshoreman?" was the next, and abrupt, question.

"Yes; though I can't say I see him doing much work, now I think of it."

"He is more than that. He has a keen intellect. I can't fathom him, and am not ready to say whether he is saint or sinner, but he's a brainy fellow."

The sport spoke in a manner which indicated more and weightier thoughts than he expressed, but did not linger. He soon announced that he was going to leave, but Abe interrupted:

"Say, mister, don't I see you ag'in?"

"Why, certainly; any time you wish. Call around!"

"But I don't mean that. Why not keep me in this game? Folks say I'm more knowin' than the average igit. I'd like ter strap on my sword an' eyeglasses an' fight et out with you, shoulder ter shoulder."

"I think you may yet have a chance. You impress me as one who is to be trusted, and I will give you a chance, if I can. I like your style."

"Thankee, boss!"

Abe felt more flattered than he cared to own, and, presently, saw Parson Joe go away with the sincere hope that he would be called upon to give further help.

"'Leven o'clock," commented the Dock Sharp, when again alone. "Guess I'll git a wiggle on an' go home."

He started, meditating upon the strange events of the night, but not sufficiently engaged in thought to be oblivious of what was transpiring around him. Thus it was that, as he neared an adjacent street-corner, he suddenly came to a stop.

There, engaged in earnest conversation, he saw Peter Glass and Captain John Twiss.

"Hi!" he breathed, "the vampires hev met! Say, b'gosh! I'll drop on them an' git onter their game!"

CHAPTER VII.

IN DANGEROUS COMPANY.

AHOY ABE was small of stature and light of foot, and he at once formed the plan of getting near enough to Twiss and Glass to overhear the subject of their rapt conversation.

Circumstances were in his favor.

They stood under a fixed awning, the outer side of which had heavy supports, and he used the latter as cover while he stole safely along the curbstone and approached them. This strategic move was successful, and he was soon where he could listen.

"We must not shut our eyes to the danger," Glass was saying. "This Parson Joe is a man to be dreaded, and we don't know how much he has got on to. Anyhow, he is shrewd enough to get right down to the meat of the matter."

"Hadn't I better make sail at once?" asked Twiss, nervously.

"And leave me to fight it out alone?"

"You forget that the danger would be less."

"To you, yes!"

"But Elise would be out of sight."

"She ought to be, now, anyhow."

"Hush!"

The captain looked around nervously, as if afraid other ears might hear.

"Well, she still lives, so let us talk from that standpoint. You are the man who has the most to gain out of this, and I am not disposed to let you evade your share of danger."

"Do you approve of the Brown Bet being left at that pier, after what has happened? Why, man, our only safety depends on lying low. Whoever fixed that skeleton scene in the cabin knew our past!"

"Your past, you mean," Glass amended. "But don't fly off at a tangent. I admit all you urge. The skeleton tableau speaks with a voice of thunder. Who could have done it?"

Twiss shook his head gloomily.

"I don't know."

"He was accurate in all—even to the poker 'hand' of four queens and an ace."

"Fatally accurate," the captain agreed.

"It brings up old scenes, messmate; scenes we don't want the world to know. I seem to hear again the wash of the waves; see the dancing lights of the old ship, the forms of the players, the gliding form of one man, knife in hand—"

"Silence!" cried John Twiss, almost furiously, in a husky whisper. "Don't let even the wind have those scenes from the past. To business, man; to business! Elise lives, and some one knows how a certain man died. We are in danger. What can we do to protect ourselves?"

"I must have time to think. This story of the skeletons in your cabin comes so unexpectedly that I don't know what to do."

"Something must be done, or we are doomed."

"True!"

"Put your wits to work, for I depend on you to work us out of the pinch. After all we have done and dared it would be something terrible to lose, now."

"I'll fix it out. See! a patrolman is coming; let us move on."

They went, and Ahoy Abe promptly walked around the block the opposite way. He saw them separate, and selecting Captain Twiss for further survey, followed that person to the Brown Bet.

Then, satisfied that no further work could be done that night, the Dock Sharp went home and retired. Before going to sleep he reviewed the events of the evening.

"Say, old boss," he muttered, addressing himself familiarly, "you hev tumbled onter a great nest o' snakes. Twiss, Glass & Co. are about as p'izen as they make them, an' they've not only done a heap o' mischief in the past, but are up ter more. Elise is in danger, an' the more I think of it, the more I suspect it was Mister Cap'n J. Twiss, Esquire, who sawed that gang-plank. Else why did he send his crew away? Else why didn't he try ter help her when she fell inter the dock? Oh! he's a corker, J. Twiss is! Then there's the captive in the Glass house. Is it man, mortal, monster or machine? Who an' wot? Two legs, or four, or none? Fish, flesh or fowl? Or—or—"

The course of speculation had grown erratic and disconnected. It now ceased.

Ahoy Abe was asleep.

He slept, and slept to dream wild dreams in which the other characters in this narrative took strange parts; but he awoke clear-headed and alert. After breakfast he left the house and walked to West street, hoping to see some of those he had met the night before.

He strolled along until he neared the dock where the Brown Bet had been. She was still

there, and sailors were lounging on her deck, but he saw neither the captain or his niece. He did not think it prudent to present himself to Twiss, then, so he wandered on northward.

More than once, in days past, he had seen Parson Joe in that vicinity, and he had a vague hope that he might happen upon the sport, then, and be informed that he was wanted by the latter as an active ally.

This did not come to pass, but he did meet some one he knew. His name was called, and he looked around and saw a man named Tim Rogers. He was a 'longshoreman, but not a steady worker. In fact Tim had periods when he was the drunkenest man in New York, but was now sober.

"Want ter go fer a sail?" he asked.

"Nope," Abe returned.

"I'd like yer company. I'm goin' up the river a few miles, to the Jersey shore, ter meet Old Grasshopper. He's got some business in view—I don't know what—an' I'm ter help him. Come along!"

Ahoy Abe was bold, but he was wary. This invitation sounded all right, but was it so? Things were not always what they seemed; perhaps a plot lurked back of it.

Yet the Dock Sharp hesitated for only a moment.

"I had an appointment with the mayor, ter go fishin' off yender pier," he coolly observed, "but he may be detained by small politicians. I shake off sech roosters, but the mayor ain't got my nerve. Why, yes; I'll go!"

"Come on, then!"

The 'longshoreman led the way, and they were soon in a trim sail-boat and speeding up the North River.

"Didn't know you owned a boat, Tim," remarked Abraham.

"I borrowed this."

"Was the owner lookin'?"

"Comel don't be 'funny'."

"Your repertation ain't A 1, Timothy, an' I wouldn't loan ye the wake o' the boat, but some folks is born foolish, an' others acquire folly. Of course you don't mind hearin' the truth."

"You dry up!"

Tim was vexed, but he soon forgot it. He took great pride in the boat, which fact tended to increase Abe's suspicions. It was a novelty for the man to have a decent boat, and a novelty no one who knew him well was likely to put in his way, as far as an ordinary loan was concerned.

"I wonder," meditated Abe, "ef Twiss an' Glass hev got their heads tergether, sized me up as a gent dangerous ter their schemes, an' hired Timothy ter decoy me away an' wipe me out? Et would surprise me more ef Tim succeeded than et would ef he tried."

Without betraying his suspicions, the Sharp continued to chat with his companion.

On the New York shore the buildings stretched away as if there was no end to the great city, but on the Jersey side they finally grew scattering. In a lonely place Tim finally landed.

"Now, Abe," he said, amiably, "I'd just like to git you ter help me a bit."

"About w'ot?"

"Some carpenter work."

"Um!"

"I've been hired ter do a job, an' you can help me a good bit. I'll give you some candy, ef you will."

"Candy!" echoed the Sharp, disdainfully. "Say! w'ot fer do you take me? Do I look like a ten-year-old Ward McAllister kid? Will be wantin' ter dress me in them blamed fool-clothes they call Lord Fauntleroy's, next, won't yer? Candy! Tim, I've a good mind ter lick you, jest ter show you I ain't no kid. Candy! Oh!"

And Abe expressed his disgust with a shudder.

"Never mind, Abe; never mind," Tim requested. "Of course you don't use candy; I spoke absent-minded-like. But you'll go, won't you?"

"Why, cert!"

Abe was just as prompt as if he felt no doubts of the giver of the invitation. He wished to test the matter. He was aware that, in a struggle, he would not be a match for Tim, but he did not intend to have any struggle while his legs remained in good condition.

The 'longshoreman secured the boat, and then they ascended the bank. A rather wild, but interesting area lay before them; one which looked like a neglected country home.

After advancing among the sparse trees and more numerous bushes for two hundred yards

they reached a house. All the window-shades were lowered, and it needed no prolonged survey to see it was not tenanted.

Tim brought a key out of his pocket and unlocked the door.

"Come in!" he directed.

"Where's Old Grasshopper? You said we wuz ter meet him."

"He may be in the house, now, though I guess he ain't got here, yet. Come right in; he will be along."

"All right, Timothy."

The Dock Sharp accepted the situation coolly and they entered. A part of the furniture of the house remained, but dust and dirt lay everywhere, and bore further witness to the fact that the former occupants had gone. Tim went upstairs, and Abe followed, constantly on the alert for danger. All might be well, but he did not want to be entrapped.

With the air of one who had been there before the leader went to a certain room. It was wholly unfurnished and bare; the only objects therein being a box of carpenter's tools and several iron objects.

"Here's where we begin!" announced Tim, very cheerfully.

"W'ot yer goin' ter do?"

"I'll show you."

The speaker began by tearing away a long board which formed a part of the wall. Then from another room he brought in a heavy plank. He bored a hole through the latter, and then from the pile of iron took an object which was a ring and a staple, combined. The latter he put through the hole in the plank and bolted on the opposite side.

Next, he had Abe assist him in lifting the plank up and fitting it in where the board had come off. It had been proportioned previously, and was a good fit. He spiked it to the timbers, and then, of all the iron, only the dangling ring was to be seen—a stout ring in an equally strong plank.

"Tim," spoke the Dock Sharp, "I ain't nat'rally devoured with undue curiosity, but I be jest now. W'ot does all this business mean?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAN WITH THE KNIFE.

THE 'longshoreman had been expecting the question.

"Abe," he replied, in his most plausible way, "et ain't fer poor people ter mix in with the affairs o' the rich, but, as I know you are a shrewd an' sensible boy, I'll tell ye w'ot I do know."

"That's the figger," Abe answered. "Jog along!"

"A rich man has gone crazy," continued Tim. "Now, ef he wuz poor, he would be taken to an asylum, fer he is dangerous mad—see?—but, ez he is rich, his folks are goin' ter keep him here, where he kin hev more luxuries; but he must be chained ter that ring fer safety. See?"

The Dock Sharp closed one eye sagaciously.

"Yep," he returned.

"I'm ter fix the room ter order, an' git paid for it, but there will be a heap o' hard liftin', an' my back is weak, an' I thought ef you come er-long with me I could divvy with you, ef you helped me in the work. See?"

"Who's the crazy man?"

"I don't know his name."

"Who's his friends?"

"Don't know that."

"Who hired you?"

"A feller who gave his name as Smith."

"But where does Old Grasshopper come in? You said he was ter be here."

"Wal, that was only a general statement o' mine," Tim confessed. "I spoke kinder off-hand, ye see. Old Grasshopper I don't know nothin' erbout. But we don't need him, anyhow. See?"

Abe was not satisfied with this explanation, but he did not see fit to say so. He had abandoned the suspicion that he had been led into a trap, and had acquired too much curiosity in regard to their work to quarrel with Tim over a small matter.

He wanted to see more of operations in the old house.

Who was to be confined there?

Certainly it was not the rich man of whom the 'longshoreman-carpenter had told. That person was purely imaginary. Moreover, friendship was not at the bottom of the scheme for confining any one there.

It was to be a living prison for some one.

Ahoy Abe longed to ask more questions, but he marked his course with prudence and determined to fall to and help Tim so faithfully that he would win further favor.

The work went on, and the place grew more and more like a prison.

Without overdoing the matter, Abe now began to talk in such a way as to give Tim the impression that he was a lawless youth, or willing to be, and, letting these ideas grow duly, he was getting ready for further questioning, when there was a new and highly-interesting change in the situation.

Footsteps sounded in the hall, and the door opened. A man walked in. Tim looked uneasy, for he saw his employer, and he had reason to believe the latter would not be pleased when he saw the young assistant. But to Ahoy Abe the new arrival meant even more.

It was Peter Glass!

Abe stood in the shadow, and the horse-tout did not at first recognize him, but, nevertheless, his face assumed a scowl.

"Who in perdition have you here?" he demanded.

"My 'prentice, boss; my 'prentice," Tim returned, hurriedly. "He's a kid I hev ter help me on odd jobs, w'en I leave 'longshore work fer carpentering."

"Didn't I tell you this job was to be done secretly?"

"Yes; an' the kid won't give nothin' away."

Peter's expression continued dark and hostile, but something worse was in store. The sun, which had been behind a cloud, came out brightly, and the result was quickly seen in the room. It made Ahoy Abe's face more distinct to the vision, and Peter Glass opened his eyes wider.

"What Satan's cub is this?" he demanded.

Tim began to answer, but Glass saw only the Dock Sharp.

"So you've shown up again!" he exclaimed.

"I'm Timothy's 'prentice," replied Abe, mildly.

"Yes, you are—not! You're a spy; that's what you are! You came to my house on a sneak, last night, and now you're still at it. By the fiends! it's lucky I suddenly decided to call around here, to-day. I've fallen onto you, and you can bet your life you don't escape me, this time!"

Tim looked in open-eyed dismay, but the Dock Sharp met the danger with his usual nonchalance.

"Now, mister, don't tear all the trimmin' off of yer night-gown," he advised. "I ain't sech a hoodoo an' vampire ez you think—"

"You are a spy, and that is enough. Tim, how came you by this young hound?"

The carpenter was alarmed, and he truthfully told how Abe happened to be along.

"You put your foot in your mouth," angrily commented Glass; "and now the kid is here we have got to hold him. It never would do to let him go free; he would ruin me. Take him, and tie him to that ring!"

The Sharp remonstrated. He made a claim to innocence, though he did not have much hope of convincing Glass; and when that failed he grew defiant and tried to enlist Tim on his side, but the carpenter was wholly under Peter's influence.

Abe was bound to the ring.

"And," remarked the plotter, "before you get out of this you will wish you had minded your own business."

"You ain't goin' ter leave me here?"

"I am."

"Say, ef you do that I'll fall all over you, by jim-hickey!"

It was not exactly clear how Abe was to do this, while so securely tied up, but the threat did not have effect, emphasized though it was by such a novel addition. He was ignored. Glass took Tim into the next room, no doubt for consultation, and the Sharp ruefully contemplated his surroundings.

He had helped put up the plank with the ring, and he knew five times his own strength would not stir it. He was a fast prisoner, sure enough.

After a while the men returned.

"We are going to leave you, boy," observed Glass, "and you will have ample chance for meditation. One thing I wish to say to you: your future—ay, even your life, perhaps—depends upon your keeping silent. Don't dare to yell, to call for help. This is a deserted house in a lonely place, and it is not likely any one would hear you, but I will not have you yelling. Understand?"

"I ain't deaf," growled Abraham.

"Anyhow, be dumb."

"My tongue will wobble w'en it gits a chance."

"The chance never will come!"

There was more in this remark than the

mere words implied; the tout's manner conveyed so much of dark and ominous threat that Abe did not see fit to chaff or irritate him further.

The carpentering was not done, but work was suspended, and the men again went out. Tim's face expressed no sympathy for the boy he had brought into such danger, but from the way he avoided Abe's gaze, the latter suspected he was not wholly satisfied with his share in the work.

Although they left the room, the prisoner had no means of knowing whether they were gone from the premises. After their footsteps ceased to sound he heard no more in the house to indicate human occupancy.

Hours passed, until the rays of the sun, dimly seen, led Abe to believe it was noon.

"Wal, I'm in fer it," he commented, in disgust. "There is a crawlin' sensation in my stomach that is suggestive of the joy of sirloin steak an' hot biscuits, but even a file, ter eat, would be welcome now. Jim-crackey! but ain't a starvin' man a movin' objick of compassion!"

He sighed dismally, though in serio-comic mood.

"Here's this prison-room ter mock me. At first I was mighty anxious ter know who was ter occupy it. I ain't so greedy on that head now. But who was it built fer? Sence P te Glass, horse tout, come inter the game, I can't help wonderin' ef the mysterious prisoner in the West street ranch was ter be moved here. Hope he won't kick 'cause I'm warmin' his quarters!"

Abe moved restlessly and sighed again. All his efforts to be cheerful amounted to but little. Accustomed as he had been to active life, captivity was hard.

The afternoon dragged away and evening shadows began to fall.

Again footsteps sounded in the hall.

Glass entered.

He set down an unlighted lantern, and then turned his gaze upon Abe.

"Boy, I have come to free you!" he announced, in a slow, deep voice.

"That's good news."

"We will see. You have made yourself obnoxious and dangerous to me. I gave you no provocation, but you meddled with my affairs and placed me in jeopardy. I dare not have you at liberty, and I have no place to hold you captive. There is but one thing to do!"

His voice took on a strange inflection, and Ahoy Abe felt a thrill of vague alarm new to him. When Glass paused he did not answer, and the tout, after a pause, added:

"You must die!"

"I object!" cried the prisoner.

"You have no voice in the matter."

Glass drew a knife and rolled back his sleeve.

"I give you two minutes for preparation," he went on, in a steady voice.

"D'y'e mean you are goin' ter set yerself up as master o' my destiny?"

The visitor pointed to the knife.

"With this I shall settle all. My own safety demands a move, and it shall be made. You are doomed. Prepare for death!"

CHAPTER IX.

NEAR TO DEATH!

If, at any time, Ahoy Abe had doubted that his captor meant all he said he doubted no longer. The face of Peter Glass told the same story as his tongue. Bad as the man was he never before had ventured upon a step so radical as that he now contemplated. He had nerved himself up to it, not only by mental effort but by means of whisky, but even the latter had not been able to dull his mind or the reproaches of, not his conscience, perhaps, but his fears.

Horror was pictured in his own face, and that expression made it all the harder for Ahoy Abe.

It emphasized his own danger, and served to upset his nerves.

He gazed silently at the horse tout.

"You wouldn't be satisfied to mind your own business," Glass continued, after a pause. "Dorcas warned me fully enough that you had played the spy in West street, but I was reluctant to show the heavy hand against a boy. I let you go when my judgment told me Dorcas's warnings were well founded, and if you had kept to yourself you would have been all right. You did not; you followed me further, and now you must take the consequences."

"I ain't follered you," Abe protested.

"Your presence, here, speaks for itself."

"No; it don't. Tim never told me where he was goin', or why, or who hired him. He got me out fer the sail, an' I went ez I've gone sailin' with others a hundred times before. Never knew anything special was in the wind until we got here, an' then he explained he had carpenter work ter do, an' was so lazy he wanted ter shirk his duties an' make me help him."

"That sounds all right, but I don't believe it. Even if I knew it was true, it would make no difference. By design or chance you have learned too much for my safety."

"I'll forgit it."

"Words are vain and useless. You must die!"

The tout took a step toward the prisoner and then paused. The hand which held the knife trembled. He looked at it in anger, as if disgusted with his own weakness. He was anxious to proceed with the work, but lacked the necessary nerve.

"Would that Twiss was here to do his own work!"

So he spoke, but he did not intend to give utterance to the words; he had mechanically voiced the thought that was in his mind.

"So et is Twiss?" returned Abe. "Now, be you goin' ter let that critter mix you up in sech biz? You don't know what you're a-doin' of. He is a long-headed villain who is ropin' you in. Et ain't your way ter be a rascal, Peter, an' you hadn't ought ter be so led astray," was the strategic addition.

"What do you know of Twiss?"

"Oh! you an' me know him."

"As I thought, you know too much."

"Yes, we know him; a cold, cunnin' reprobate who sees only his own selfish ends, an' is willin' ter sacrifice you, or me, or anybody else, ter git his own nest feathered. That's his game, but among men o' brains he can't work his riddle. See?"

"You talk well, but I am not to be turned from my purpose."

"Want ter be a murderer, do ye?"

"If you want to put it that way, yes."

"Want ter hev yer sleep broke up by nightmares an' horrors, do ye? Want ter skulk like a wolf fer fear o' bein' gobbled up by a perleece-man, eh? Want ter feel when a man looks at ye that he kin see inter yer heart, an' see how black et is, hey? Want ter hear even the winds shriekin' in yer ears: 'Murderer! MURDERER!' That's wot yer hanker fer, is it?"

Ahoy Abe spoke with dramatic force, and Glass was not proof against the speech.

"You put it strongly," he muttered.

"I put et true."

"Bah!"

"You see. I tell yer, the murderer don't know no rest."

"Bah!"

Peter uttered the exclamation again, but without any show of genuine confidence, or contempt for the prisoner's predictions. He took a flask from his pocket and drank deeply. A few more such drinks would make him valiant or put him to sleep.

"There ain't any rush about this," he remarked, "and I will give you half an hour to make your preparations for the next world."

Then he sat down and lighted the lantern. As far as outward appearances went, he was more relieved by the postponement than Abe, but the latter was not deceived into the belief that he had grounds for hope.

Glass fully intended to carry out his threat.

The latter soon took another drink, and then he fell to stropping the knife on his shoe. The weapon did not need sharpening, nor was he trying to torture Abe; it was simply to work up his own courage.

The Dock Sharp renewed his efforts to persuade his captor to abandon his intention, though without much hope.

If the horse-tout was not accustomed to do murder, he did have a long criminal career back of him; a career which bristled with evil deeds, with all that was mean and contemptible; and he would sacrifice his best friend to further his own interests.

At another time, perhaps, he would have done the present work without hesitation.

Finding that his words were thrown away, Ahoy Abe ceased to speak. The scene was gloomy and impressive.

The by no means clean lantern sent out a dim, uncertain light which quivered on the bare walls and ceiling in a ghostly way, and Abe would have been a marvel had he been at ease then.

He was not at ease. Menaced by violent death, he was downcast, nervous and hopeless.

Glass grew more befuddled mentally, and when

he finally tried to rise, his legs proved to be in the same condition.

He managed to get his balance, however, and then he secured a lump of coal which had caught his attention and given him an idea.

Holding this, he went to the painted wall and began to draw lines and figures.

The Sharp watched him mechanically.

First of all, Peter formed what might have been a box, and the fact that it was oblong was unpleasantly suggestive of a coffin. But the artist did not pause there—he drew a grotesque female figure within the lines and then proceeded to make another object like it.

Five figures he drew, but in the last he placed, not the image of a woman, but lines forming a flattened diamond.

Next, he added a few touches to the former works, and what he intended to do became plain.

He had drawn the likeness of five playing-cards—four queens and the ace of diamonds.

It was precisely the same "hand" which Ahoy Abe had seen in the possession of the skeleton player in the cabin of the Brown Bet!

"Gee-hoss fly!" muttered the Sharp.

Perhaps Peter Glass heard him; anyhow, the tout laughed loudly.

"Them are the winning cards!" he declared.

Abe said nothing.

"I'll back that 'hand' against all that won't beat it, and," Peter added, with a cunning leer, "there are few that can beat it, unless a knife is rung in!"

It was a significant remark when the tableau in the cabin was considered.

Peter seemed to find something amusing in the case, for he threw off his depression and laughed long and loudly. There was no real mirth in the demonstration, however, and it brought no relief to the prisoner. It simply showed that the tout was in a mood where he was prepared for anything, and that, too, meant that conscience and fear would play no part in the case. He finally ceased laughing and turned up on Abe again.

"There is no use of delaying this job," he announced. "I have given you time for preparation. Are you ready to die?"

"No, I ain't!" the Sharp declared.

"Then it is your fault. I'm not to blame, and I will now finish the job. Pleasant journey to you, old boy!"

Glass swung the lantern upon his left arm like a railroad conductor, and advanced with the knife in his right hand. Now, there was no faltering in his purpose, even if his legs wobbled somewhat. His eyes had a glassy aspect, and he was ripe for mischief.

"Keep off!" Abe ordered, in a startled way.

"It's no use, boy."

"Say, do you want ter swing fer this?"

"I'll take my chances. Here goes!"

He swung up the knife with reckless unconcern, but the stroke was delayed. Another voice broke the silence.

"Hold on!"

The order came from near the door, and Glass turned as quickly as his condition would permit. Ahoy Abe looked, too, and his spirits suddenly took a jump.

Tim Rogers was there.

"I won't see violence done here!" Tim exclaimed. "Let the boy alone!"

He stretched one hand out toward Abe, but his manner was not so bold as his words.

"You fool!" cried Glass, "didn't I tell you to go home?"

"I didn't go."

"You want to, at once. Get out of here!"

"I won't see harm done the boy," Tim persisted, though his voice quavered. "He sha'n't die. Let him alone!"

"That's right, mister!" Ahoy Abe cried.

"Don't let this assassin git at me with his knife!"

"I won't."

"Tim Rogers," grated the tout, "do you dare to set your will up against mine? Don't you know I could take you by the heels and hammer your weak brains out? And see this knife; and this revolver! Do you dare go against me? Do you dare?"

He had drawn a glittering revolver, and Tim's face paled. He was a coward; he stood in awe of Glass, anyhow; and his knees shook as he made answer:

"I'm goin' ter stand by the boy."

"Where are your weapons?"

"I ain't got none."

"Then," cried Glass, "you must be anxious to die. Fool! will you throw your own life away? You are but a child in my hands. Get out of here, or die!"

CHAPTER X.

SHOOTING TO KILL.

TIM stood in fear and irresolution. Glass had ordered him to return to New York, and he had made a feint of obeying, but, suspecting that Ahoy Abe was in danger, he had not gone. Lingered, he had watched the progress of events until the crisis came, and then revealed himself, not courageously, but in sheer desperation.

He had broken the laws more than once, but he was not evil enough to be satisfied to stand and see a boy deliberately butchered.

He did not leave the room when Glass ordered him to, but his knees quaked more than ever.

"You ain't goin' ter do this," he persisted, feebly.

"Oh, you poor, sniveling cur!" the tout grated, "have you no brains? Get out of here!—get out!"

He started toward Tim, but Ahoy Abe, in trying to make a good argument, made a "break," instead.

"That's right!" he remarked, mockingly; "he can't do better than go, an' then he will be a witness ag'inst you w'en you're tried fer killin' me. See?"

"The fiends! that's so. If I let him go, he will be in position to ruin me. He must not go; he must die with you!"

The critical nature of the case was stirring Pete's whisky-muddled wits, and he saw clearly enough, at last. He drew a bead upon Tim, and that person's last remnant of courage faded away. He turned to flee, but was not quick enough. Glass pulled the trigger, and his former ally fell heavily to the floor. He lay groaning, but without further sign of life.

"One!" Glass flourished the revolver and laughed as he uttered the word, and was in a state of great excitement. Then he turned upon Ahoy Abe.

"Your turn!" he shouted.

He leveled the revolver.

Helpless Abe gave up hope.

There was a report, and the Dock Sharp believed he felt the bullet pass through his body. He had dauntlessly kept his eyes wide open, however, and he was somewhat surprised to see Pete's revolver fall with a clatter to the floor. Then the tout held up his hand, and blood dripped from it.

"Dog! I have a good mind to kill you outright!"

A deep voice uttered the words, and again Abe's gaze flashed toward the door. A cry of joy passed his lips. A man stood there, revolver in hand.

It was Parson Joe, the sport!

"Whoop!" shouted the Sharp.

Parson Joe marched forward. He did not take his gaze from Pete's face, and his eyes flashed with indignation. There seemed good reason why Abe should feel a complete revulsion of feeling, for he looked capable of crushing Pete as he would a worm.

"This is fine business you are in!" he added, in a deep, aggressive voice.

"And what have you done?" Glass bitterly asked, holding up his wounded hand.

"I have maimed a snake!"

"You can't say much; you are nothing but a sport."

"It is an unworthy calling, I admit," Joe agreed, the old expression of sadness appearing in his face. "I claim no nobility; I admit my weakness; but this much is certain—I never tried to butcher a boy like an ox in the shambles. Coward!—coward!"

"You can talk well, now I am wounded. You wouldn't do it if I was whole."

"Your hurt is but a scratch. I fired and took your own revolver from your hold. I touched you with the same shot, but I repeat that it's only a scratch. If you think I am disposed to take advantage of your position, pick up your revolver and let us fight it out."

"I won't!" Glass suddenly returned.

"As you see fit."

Parson Joe stooped and picked up the fallen weapon. He did not intend to give Peter a chance to shoot him in the back. Then he turned to Ahoy Abe.

"My poor lad, have you been crushed by indignities?" he asked.

"Nary crush," responded the Sharp, buoyantly. "There has been a pile o' dog-an'-cat biz here, an' I guess won't never be nearer death until I really go up the flume, but, jest now, I'm as chipper as a sparrer cop in Central Park. I ain't hurt, Joseph, but ef you hadn't showed

up ez you did I wouldn't be here now ter testify in the case. Nary time!"

"I am thankful you have escaped injury, but that you have escaped is not due to any good will on the part of yonder cur. He shall be held accountable for what he tried to do."

Quickly the speaker liberated Ahoy Abe.

"Now to see if this man," pointing to Tim, "is really dead. He is silent, but may have fainted from loss of blood."

Timothy turned his head slightly.

"When you git Glass tied up I reckon I shall recover," he remarked, faintly.

"Aren't you wounded?"

"I hope not. Ye see, jest as he fired I tripped an' fell, so the bullet whistled over my head, an' ef it didn't glance back an' hit me, I ain't mutilated. Tie Glass up, an' I reckon I'll soon git well!"

Evidently, Tim's cunning was better developed than his bravery.

Glass was not disposed to fight. He was brave enough, but he over-estimated his wound, and did not think he was capable of making resistance. Thus, Parson Joe was able to bind him without trouble, and he was soon helpless and tied to the same ring which had lately held Abraham Dow. The sport looked to the hand-wound, and, as he had expected, found it but slight.

"Explanations are in order," he then announced. "Abe, how came you in this fix?"

Briefly the Dock Sharp told the story, and Parson Joe was not slow to draw deductions therefrom.

"So Mr. Glass wanted a prison, here," he commented. "Of course, having it, he would want a prisoner, too. This was not you, for you were seized simply because you had learned too much. I wonder who the desired prisoner was."

He looked, not at Abe, but at Glass. That person, however, did not act upon the suggestion; he held his peace.

"Possibly you will explain," pursued Joe.

"I will not say a word!" the tout declared.

"So be it. Abe, come outside."

They went, and Joe then asked:

"Do you want that knave arrested?"

"I dunno. Why?"

"It occurs to me that Glass, free, may be a better subject to work upon than Glass, in prison. By shadowing him we may get light. See?"

"Cert, an' I'm o' your mind. Let the p'izon skunk peramberlate."

"Better still, we will for the present leave him shut up in his own prison. Possibly some friend of his will come to release him. If so, let him go; if not, let him remain here until the pangs of hunger get at work on his stomach."

"That's the figger; hold ter yer plan, Joseph, an' you will find A. Dow, Esquire, ready ter back yer up while his chin an' nose continer ter make bows ter each other over his beef-steak an' apple-dumplings."

So saying the Sharp gravely shook Joe by the hand, and the latter answered:

"I shall be glad to have such an ally, and I believe we shall find the partnership agreeable. Here comes Tim Rogers. I fancy we want to take him back to New York with us, for he might take a fancy to whiffle around to Glass, to save his own skin. He fears the tout desperately."

Tim came up to them.

"Boss," he said, "I want ter put myself right with you. I ain't the worst man livin', ef I did agree ter work fer Pete Glass. Give me a chance, an' I'll prove I am white."

"Mr. Rogers, what do you know of Glass, anyhow?"

"Not much, except that he's a horse-tout, swindler an' crook-in-general; but ef you want primers on him, I kin take you ter a person who is dead onter him."

"Is that true?"

"Yes."

"Who is it?"

"A woman named Matilda Farmer. She has two sisters, Deborah and Dorcas, who keep house fer Glass. They are tough as sin, but Matilda is off of a different piece. She is an honest woman who has shook her sisters 'cause they be so tough. See?"

"And this woman lives—where?"

"On Leroy street, New York."

"I'll see her; I wish I had known of her before. I saw Old Grasshopper, the 'longshoreman, to get just this information, but he would not tell me anything; at least, he refused to do so then. Previous to this, getting out of patience in my efforts to find Old Grasshopper, I had made a bold move and sent a note to Glass,

by Ahoy Abe, here. It was a recommendation, but its origin must have killed its usefulness; Glass did not bite. Now, I would like to see Matilda Farmer."

"I'll lead you to her."

Tim seemed to be anxious to improve his standing, and they left the old house and Glass, and walked to the river.

The sail-boat was still there, and the trio entered and started for New York.

"How did you git over, Joe?" asked Abe.

"By the ferry. I dogged Glass, and crossed from Forty-second street with him, unseen. I did not intend to reveal myself at all, but, of course, when I saw you in such peril I had to act."

"An' you did et like a hero. Great bed-bugs! but wouldn't I 'a' been a rare specimen now only for your help! Joseph, you're a corker!"

Again the Sharp shook Joe's hand.

The boat took them quickly to the metropolis, where a landing was duly made. Then all went to Leroy street.

Tim did not think that his presence would serve to help the sport, so the latter went to the house alone. It was a humble place, and Matilda Farmer herself opened the door. She readily agreed to see the applicant on business, and led the way to the parlor.

Parson Joe came to the point without much delay.

"I wish information of one Peter Glass," he explained.

Matilda sighed.

"The less you know of him, the better," she asserted.

"Still, my interests require a contrary course, and I should be greatly obliged for any information you can give."

"Suppose I know nothing?"

"Your sisters are at his house."

"Of them, at least, I know nothing."

"I appreciate your feelings, for I know, in part, how you are situated. My errand does not concern them; we need not mention their names. To get to business at once—did you ever hear of one Hiram Bentley?"

Matilda started.

"You are not so ignorant as you seem!" she exclaimed.

"I do not pretend to be ignorant, but I wish you to tell me more than I now know."

"Before I do that, I must be convinced that I ought to do it. Idle curiosity I will not satisfy, but I am not deaf to the demands of duty. Can you give good reason for wishing to know of this? What was Hiram Bentley to you?"

With emotion the sport replied:

"He was my father!"

"Your father?"

"Yes."

"Luckless inheritance!"

"What do you mean?"

"That I do not believe much of good luck comes to any one descended from the perpetrator or the victim of violence, and Hiram Bentley was murdered!"

CHAPTER XI.

A TRAGEDY RECALLED.

PARSON JOE breathed heavily.

"Did you witness that tragedy?" he asked.

"No," Matilda replied. "I never should have known of it had not Peter Glass babbled when under the influence of liquor. He told the story to my sisters, Dorcas and Deborah, when I was present, and they laughed at the recital. Even before that I had felt doubts of their being in an upright way of life, and when that incident took place I cut loose from them forever."

"So Glass was concerned in the murder?"

"No; but he knew of it."

"From whom?"

Matilda hesitated, and then answered:

"I am reluctant to speak of this, though I am well aware I should have told all long ago; but if, as you claim, you are the son of Hiram Bentley, you have a right to know all. A certain Captain John Twiss dealt the blow!"

"Ah!"

Parson Joe's mind flashed back to recent events. Ahoy Abe had told him of the events on the Brown Bet, in a general way, and he had not failed to remember the facts and names.

"What was he captain of?" the sport added.

"A vessel; he was a sea-captain."

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know. He was living then, and may be yet."

"Please tell just what Glass said."

"He had been drinking and playing cards with another man, who had gone out. The cards lay on the table, and the liquor was in Glass's brain."

He rose, took five of the cards from the others, selecting them carefully, and with hammer and tacks nailed them to the wall in a row.

"They were the ace of diamonds and four queens, the latter combination being of four suits, one card of each.

"This done, he laughed loudly.

"That's a better poker 'hand' than I've held to-night," he declared, "but it didn't win!"

"The curiosity of my sisters was aroused, and they asked for an explanation. Prudence made him hesitate for awhile, but it was overbalanced by the courage of whisky.

"I have a friend, Captain John Twiss," he said, "who did up a poker-player as he was about to win on that 'hand.' Twiss was not in the game, but his friend was against him who held those cards. Just before, or after, the holder was about to show them, Twiss stabbed him in the back. The man he killed was Hiram Bentley!"

In a hard voice, Parson Joe asked:

"Why did he do it?"

"I only know that Bentley was in his way. And you really are his son."

"I am! Yes; the son of a man who was foully slain; who was robbed of life without a moment for preparation; who was struck in the back as only the vilest and most cowardly of men would strike."

"And don't you know the cause?"

I do not."

"Strangel!"

"Until very lately I knew no more than that my father was dead, but when I learned that he had perished by violence and that his death had never been avenged, I took up the trail, resolved to learn all, if I could, and then punish the man, or men, who had done the deed. Convinced, by my meager information, that I must look among the sporting fraternity, I became a so-called 'sport' myself, and have led the life tirelessly. Yet I never could quite go the pace, and some of the fraternity have suspected that I was not what I seemed, but I think no clew to my purpose has ever leaked out."

Parson Joe spoke musingly, as if reviewing the past merely for his own satisfaction, but suddenly aroused.

"Surely," he added, "you must have gained some inkling to the motive of the crime?"

"I did not. If Glass knew, he did not tell. Possibly he did know; I can't say; but he told what he did simply because liquor had made him reckless, and seemed to make a clean breast of all. Dorcas questioned him closely, and she had great influence over him, but he told nothing definite."

"Well, what I have learned of you is of great value, and I hope much from it. I know now who the destroyer was; the next step is to learn the motive. After that—*revenge!*"

"Surely, you won't usurp the purposes of law?" cried Matilda, in dismay. "You won't take the matter of revenge into your own hands?"

"Who knows?"

Making the reply deeply, somberly, Parson Joe abruptly rose. He walked to the door, and then turned.

"Madam," he added, "I am working in a cause where I cannot show delicate treatment to scoundrels. Just what I do will depend upon what I have chance to do."

So saying he walked out, and his expression indicated that he meant all he suggested. He rejoined Ahoy Abe and Tim. If he had talked frankly to the former, it would have been better for him then, for the Dock Sharp had not told all that he saw on board the Brown Bet after Elise's adventure. Mutual explanation would have advanced the case rapidly, but Parson Joe had been thrown into a gloomy mood and did not feel confidential.

Despite this reserve, he was friendly toward his companions. Tim they soon left, and, shortly after, Joe and Abe separated.

"I'll soon see you again," remarked the sport, and then he left his ally.

"I kinder hate ter have him go," muttered Abe, as he watched the other out of sight. "I take an interest in him, an' I'd sort of like ter stick by him. The night is still young; why couldn't we have put it in by doin' some work? There's nothin' stirrs up sluggish blood like right-down solid work. Nobody gathers barnacles while the perspiration is lavin' his Choctaw brow."

The Sharp was wandering on as he indulged in these philosophical thoughts, and it suddenly occurred to him that he was nearing the place where he had last seen the schooner Brown Bet.

He decided to have another look at the scene, and took steps accordingly.

The Brown Bet still lay in the dock, a fact which he had not wholly expected. Doubting Captain Twiss as he did he had all along felt a suspicion that the mariner would get under way and leave New York, but there the schooner was, surely. Either Twiss had not tried to drown Elise, or he thought his secret safe.

There was no sign of life on the craft. It rocked lazily in its place, but might have been wholly deserted, as far as outward signs went. Abe cautiously approached by means of a detour which took him to the place without much danger of his being seen by any one on the schooner. Then he sat down with his back to a box and looked and meditated.

He did not pay much attention to anything back of him, but believed he was fairly alert until, happening to look to one side, he was surprised to see a man standing on the pier within a few feet of him.

"Old Grasshopper!"

Abe breathed, rather than spoke, the name. The discovery was a surprise. What was the mysterious 'longshoreman' doing there? It was impossible for one who knew him well to be mistaken in his identity. Nature had put distinctive marks upon the man, which made his figure recognizable whenever its outlines could be traced.

The Dock Sharp, sitting quietly in the shadow of the box, was out of sight and enabled to watch everything. He saw that Old Grasshopper was looking fixedly at the schooner, and the fact tended to arouse all of Abe's interest.

"Is the feller saint or sinner?" the latter wondered. "How much, an' how little, does he know? Kin he tell all these secrets ef he would?"

The 'longshoreman's long survey was done at last, and he turned and walked along the pier to the street. Abe did not stir. He had a vague idea that more was to follow, and even if the man was about to leave, he did not think he would be rewarded for following.

As well remain there and see the matter out.

Old Grasshopper crossed the street and disappeared in a house on the opposite side, but his absence was but temporary. He reappeared, and with him came a second man. They bore some burden which was large but did not tax their strength greatly.

With this they came again to the pier, walking down boldly, yet without undue noise. As they drew near to the watcher he discovered more, and enough to startle him.

The burden they bore was a box, and it was in the form of a coffin!

CHAPTER XII.

STRANGE EVENTS ON THE SCHOONER.

AHOY ABE felt a peculiar sensation as if his nerves had been suddenly charged with electricity; a feeling commonly denominated "creepy."

That the box was a genuine coffin he did not doubt, but what figure did it cut? Plainly, if it then had any occupant, the latter must be of light weight. More likely it was vacant. Was an occupant to be found on the schooner?

He thought of Elise's narrow escape from death; of the peril which, he suspected, had been deliberately forced upon her by Captain Twiss. Had another, more successful, attempt been made to end her life?

He had not thought to see Old Grasshopper appear as an ally of the skipper of the Brown Bet, but there was no such thing as placing the 'longshoreman positively for good or evil.

Quietly the coffin-bearers advanced to the schooner, and by means of the gang-plank, walked upon her deck. At this point their manner became so cautious that Abe's fears for Elise began to abate.

But what meant the strange proceeding?

After a little delay the coffin was set down, and its late bearers went to one side. Dark as it was, Abe made out that they had gone below, and a reckless resolution came to him.

He determined to seek the vessel's deck and see and hear all that occurred.

"Ef Old Grasshopper is up ter mischief, an' goin' ter git ketched, I guess I kind stand the rifle as well as him, but ef thar ain't any war, why, I'll be safe, anyhow."

Abe did not half believe in his theory, but he did go on board the Brown Bet at once. He could not, when he arrived there, understand the silence which was over the craft. One would suppose, after the scare Twiss had received when the skeletons were introduced there, that he would guard the place well.

Despite that, outsiders now had free run of the deck, if not of the whole craft.

Going near to the box, the Sharp found that it was a genuine coffin in all respects. A dim glitter at one point gave him an idea, and he struck a match.

On the coffin there was a silver plate, duly inscribed. He read with eager interest:

"JOHN TWISS,

CAPTAIN OF THE SCHOONER BROWN BET,

Died July 27, 1888.

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN!"

Abe had a fresh surprise. The inscription held a world of meaning. It declared that Twiss "died July 27, 1888," yet it was then only July 20 of that year. The specified date was still a week away. Was there a distinct and ominous threat in the line?

The final words, too, were suggestive. "Gone but not forgotten!" Some one, it seemed, would remember the skipper. But would it be with kindness? Abe did not think so, and for his safety, if not for any other reason, he was glad he was not John Twiss. Old Grasshopper appeared in a new light, and as the mariner's enemy, if Abe did not err.

His match had died out, and he suddenly aroused and determined to have a view of the cabin. Advancing cautiously, he looked down.

Old Grasshopper and another man were there, but nobody was visible who seemed to belong to the schooner. This fact made the mystery deeper.

John Twiss might have learned that he was in peril, but he was a brave man, and hardly the one to abandon his craft without an effort to get it away.

The 'longshoreman' looked disappointed and angry.

"I don't understand this," Abe heard him say.

"She may have gone ashore with Twiss."

"The sailor said she was here."

"But that was some time ago."

"Can Twiss have spirited her away?"

"Looks that way."

Old Grasshopper clinched his rough hand.

"If I am foiled, there will be dark work before another day. I have played a patient game; I have worked in the dark and hung to plans long since laid, and it's man's way to stand by his plots; but if the current is running against me, I will show the power which is mine. But you don't understand, of course— Enough! Make one more search, and we will abide by it!"

The speaker turned away impatiently, and he and his companion began the work. Abe did not venture to descend, but kept his place above and awaited the result.

He did not have long to wait for developments; a cry sounded, and before he could locate it fully, two persons hurriedly came in to the main cabin—staggered would, perhaps, be the better word, for one was supporting the other and their movements were uneven.

It was Old Grasshopper and—Elise!

The girl fell upon her knees at the 'longshoreman's feet.

"Spare me! spare me!" she implored, holding up her clasped hands to him.

It was a picture which thrilled Ahoy Abe. The girl, dressed in white and with her hair flowing loose, had never been more beautiful, while the sorrow and alarm pictured in her face had due effect.

A strong contrast she was to the deformed man before her, and if she never had seen him before it was no wonder, if she was taken by surprise, that she was alarmed.

"Be calm!" he directed.

"Spare me! spare me!" she repeated.

"Child, be at ease; no harm shall come to you."

"Let me go; let—"

"You shall go, and away from this place. I have come to take you."

"What new plot has John Twiss formed?"

"I know not the plots of the man," Old Grasshopper replied, his rough face darkening with the blood which passion flushed to the surface. "My work is not his work, and I thank Providence for it."

"Will you take me where he cannot find me?" the girl cried, hope flashing to her face.

"Yes."

"Then may Heaven bless you!"

"Tis your blessing I want, child."

"You shall have it, a thousand times!"

"Come!" he added, lifting her to her feet.

"Come with me and you shall not regret it. An honest heart beats in the gnarled frame

re has seen fit to give me, and though my speech may be rough I know how to do well by the child of—by you, I mean. Come! With me there is rest, peace, safety—I almost dare hope, happiness. Trust me, and if events draw from me the last drop of blood that beats in my veins, that drop shall be shed in your defense willingly. Trust me!"

Ahoy Abe could hardly believe he was looking at, and listening to, the man who was known as a curt, ill-mannered, silent Sphinx.

Old Grasshopper's rugged face had grown almost handsome with the gentleness within it, and his voice had lost its asperity. Elise looked into his eyes and answered:

"I will trust you."

"You do well."

The 'longshoreman's aid had been standing near, but a motion from the leader now brought him forward.

"We will go at once," Old Grasshopper added.

They turned to go on deck, the 'longshoreman supporting Elise, and Ahoy Abe retreated to a distance. He intended to have an interview with the leader later on, but feared that his appearance at that juncture would prejudice that person against him, as he probably would be taken for a spy.

Once on deck Old Grasshopper spoke in a low voice to his follower, and then himself led Elise toward the pier. The second man seized the coffin, carried it below and deposited it in the middle of the cabin.

This done he hastened up and joined his companions where they had paused, at the edge of the pier.

It looked as if Elise was to be taken away successfully, and the Dock Sharp was prepared to follow, but the movement fell through in the very moment of success. There was a sound of voices on the pier, and several men hastened forward with heavy steps.

"Thunder!" cried a voice, "somebody's takin' the gal away!"

"At them, men!"

It was a quick, angry command, but Abe was not slow to recognize Twiss. The captain had returned most inopportunistically.

He and those with him were men accustomed to act very promptly when once a decision had been reached. He sprang upon Elise's rescuers, and a fierce struggle began. Dim as the light was, Abe saw more than one knife rise and fall, but what execution was done he could not tell. Plainly, however, Twiss and his gang were determined to win at all hazards, and they had no such thing as conscience to stand in the way of deeds of darkness.

The Sharp was not one to stand idle when such a scene was going on, and he ran across the gang-plank.

"Let up, you pirates!" he cried. "Quit yer antics, or I'll hev a platoon o' perleeces down from Headquarters. How's that fer a primer?"

He saw Captain Twiss near him, and accompanied the question with a blow at the mariner's face which staggered the latter, but the rush of the assailants had so forced Old Grasshopper back that, despite their most desperate endeavors, they were very near the edge of the pier.

But on the street the tap of a patrolman's billy was heard, and the Sharp raised his voice in a call for blue-coat aid.

The call came too late. Elise's defenders were forced back further yet, and Abe made a move to dodge the crowd and avoid a tumble; but at that juncture Old Grasshopper was flung heavily back by the force of a blow. He struck against Abe, and both fell headlong into the dock.

The Sharp struck in the most awkward way imaginable, and was not a little jarred thereby, but he soon got his limbs in motion with the instinct of a good swimmer.

He could see nothing of the 'longshoreman, though he was positive that the latter had gone into the water, but as he was aware that he could swim, the Sharp gave all his attention to his own affairs. And he had need to. The tide was running in a rough, swift fashion, and he did not seem able to combat it with his usual skill. After some labor he gained hold on one of the supports of the pier, and after a good deal of work, climbed up to the top.

The fight was over.

Near the schooner was a group, of which policemen formed a part, but there was no excitement.

Abe hastened toward them, and soon saw that, besides the officers, no one was there except Twiss and his followers.

Elise, Old Grasshopper and the latter's aid

were alike missing. Those who remained were talking, and the first distinct words the Sharp heard were from one of the patrolmen:

"You are lucky to get off so easy."

"Who do you think they were?" Twiss asked.

"River-thieves!"

"Ah!" murmured Twiss, with a show of innocence.

"Those contemptible fellows are thick around here, and they rob right and left. Of course we do the best we can with them, but we can't always be around."

"Undoubtedly it was they."

"Sure!"

Ahoy Abe sprang forward and cried:

"Officer, don't you believe et. This man—"

"Ha!" exclaimed Twiss, "here's one of them now. I saw him using a knife. Officer, arrest him!"

CHAPTER XIII.

LOCKED IN!

THE audacity of the charge for a moment deprived Ahoy Abe of breath. His life about the streets of New York had so sharpened his wits that he was usually ready to hold his own, but Captain Twiss had played a bold card and played it well.

The Dock Sharp rallied as soon as possible.

"Gammon!" he retorted; "you can't make that yarn go down here. I rather guess, Johnny Twiss, ef that's yer name, that I'm erbout as well known around here as you be. Me, a river-pirate? Oh! come off yer perch, old man!"

"Boys, didn't you see him?"

Twiss turned to his gang, and they answered in chorus:

"Yes; sure!"

"Bet yer gum-drops, ye did!" Abraham agreed, frankly. "When you turned pirate, honest folks had ter chip in. Ask the gal! Where is she?"

"Almost prostrated by the attempt to kidnap her," Twiss explained, severely, "she fainted. Officer, take this young tough into custody, and I will appear against him in court to-morrow."

Now, it so happened that of the two policemen one was new on the beat, and the other had a dislike to Abe without good cause. The latter seized the Sharp by the arm.

"You can go with us, cully!" he stated.

"But, say; this ain't right. Ef you'll look inter et you will find et jest as I say. I ain't built right fer a crook, an' I kin prove et. You see—"

"Oh! shut the kid off!"

The second officer spoke in disgust, and Abe saw everything was going against him. His own friends remained absent, while his accusers were out in numbers and ready to swear to anything.

"Call the gal!" he requested, earnestly. "Give her a chance ter say who's the toughs, an' who ain't. Ef she sides ag'inst me I'll waltz over ter the jug an' say never a word."

"Yes; having scared her into a faint, he is now sharp enough to leave it to one who can't squeak," put in Twiss.

"It won't work. Come on, cully!"

"But, say, officer; that gal is in danger! Don't leave her with Cap'n Twiss. He's her enemy."

"Rubbish!"

"Gammon!"

The first exclamation was from Twiss; the second from the patrolman. Abe was only a boy, while Twiss was a corpulent captain on the high seas, and when Twiss said "Rubbish!" the misguided policeman felt it his duty to say "Gammon!" He said it, and felt better, but it did not affect Abe that way, especially as the blue-coat began to pull him away.

"Say, General, d'ye know Old Grasshopper?" persisted Abraham.

"Now, you see here, don't be too fresh! I don't know Old Grasshopper, Young Grasshopper, or Middle-aged Grasshopper. Naw! And I don't want to. But if you think you can give any more of your sass, you're wrong. Try it, and I'll t'ump you in the jaw with my billy. See?"

Perhaps the blue-coat was excusable for not recognizing the fact that the to-him-unknown "Old Grasshopper" was really a human being, but the seemingly flippant question had so irritated him that he shook his prisoner and punched him in the ribs, and Abe saw he had got to accept his fate for the time being.

Ill-luck followed him to the station-house.

He had fondly believed he would find enough old police friends to effect his release, but a new sergeant was at the desk, and a formal charge was written on the books and Sharp ignominiously thrust into a cell, without attention being given

to his request to be a patrolman. There he was left alone.

"Well, by jim-hickey!" he then soliloquized, "ter think I should come ter this! Here is the pride o' the Dow family bottled up like a dime-museum freak, an' charged with bein' a river-pirate an' all them things. Je-hossfly! but ef the mayor knew of it he would bu'st all the buttons he's got off, a-tryin' fer ter git here quick an' bail me out. I give ye a primer on that!"

The victim of the occasion was managing to take his incarceration philosophically, but the turn of humor soon departed.

He thought of Elise and Old Grasshopper.

The 'longshoreman had disappeared in the river completely, and though the Sharp tried to convince himself that the former might have been playing some deep game, he could not avoid entertaining the fear that the earthly career of the deformed man had ended then and there.

Otherwise, why had Abe been unable to see him?

As for Elise, she was left to Captain Twiss's mercy, or lack thereof.

As near as he could understand there had been trouble between them already. Old Grasshopper and his men had been unable to find her, at first. Had she been confined somewhere by Twiss, and only released after long effort on the rescuer's part?

This seemed likely, and Abe feared for her. John Twiss was a villain. If, as the boy thought to be the case, Elise was in his way, what would he not do?

"Here I be like a rat," lamented the Sharp, "an' it will all be over afore mornin'. Twiss will know he can't carry on his bluff, an' he will fix things quick. The Brown Bet will be gone by daylight. An' where will Elise be?"

Gloomy enough the faithful young champion found the outlook, but even that did not make him dwell long upon it. He fell asleep before he realized the approach of slumber, and did not awaken until daylight.

It was the rattling of a key in the cell-door which aroused him, and he sprang to his feet. When the barrier swung back he saw the captain of the precinct, with whom he was well and favorably acquainted.

"Gl-ry E Pluribus!" he cried, "I never was gladder ter see anybody. That's straight, by gam!"

"So it's really you, Abe? I saw the name recorded on the blotter, but could hardly believe you had got arrested on such a serious charge."

"You don't want ter b'lieve it, Cap, fer et ain't true—or, w'ot I mean, I ain't guilty. I'm here as the result of a condemn'd scheme, an' by the flobby conduct of a perleeceman on your force who ain't fit ter sweep up dirt fer the Street Commissioner. See?"

"Is it a plot against you?"

"Sure!"

"Prove it, and I'll see you out of it."

"Well, Cap, the first thing you want ter do is ter hustle some o' yer argus-eyed cops down ter the pier where I was pulled in, an' straightway lay a-bolt on my accusers, John Twiss an' gang. An' right there you will find my witnesses, Elise an'—an'— Well, ef Old Grasshopper ain't sunk ter terror firmus at the bottom o' the river, he will tell you w'ot is w'ot!"

Abraham was excited, and he talked himself out of breath without giving the police captain a chance to say anything.

Naturally, he wished for more light before acting, but a little conversation sufficed to make all clear, and, having faith in the Sharp, it dawned upon the officer that there really was serious need of action.

He selected three policemen, put himself at their head, took Abe along, and then went to the pier. Although the Sharp had predicted failure on account of the delay, the leader had strong hopes of scoring a success, but, when they sighted the pier, Abe exclaimed:

"We're too late!"

"Too late?"

"The Brown Bet is gone!"

Sure enough; where the schooner had rested, the water now rippled unchecked by any burden on its crest. The Twiss craft had disappeared.

The police captain and Abe were alike reluctant to believe the positive evidence, and it was not until the latter had looked long and anxiously in all directions that he gave up trying to sight the schooner.

Convinced, at last, it became clear that Twiss had been too wise to remain and meet the test of future events; he had clapped sail to the Brown Bet and gone—whither?

"Perhaps not beyond the water limits of New

York, Jersey City or Brooklyn," remarked the police-captain, hopefully.

"Let's investigate!"

It was a practical suggestion, and they went to work upon it at once. Few people were around, however, who had been there during the night, and it was only after considerable effort that they found a man who had seen the Brown Bet leave. While he was not sure of the hour, it seemed that the conspirators had lost but little time in getting away after the late adventure.

"Never mind," the captain advised. "Their flight shows their guilt plainly, and the movement may not be as successful as they hope. Unless they have put out to sea, we will have them yet."

"Et may be too late ter save Elise," replied Abe.

"Let us hope not."

"Well, I'll skurry away now, an' see ef I kin find Old Grasshopper. The idee ain't been out o' my head fer a minute that he may be drowneded, but ef he's alive, I'll find him. So-long. I'm off!"

"Wait a bit!"

"Wait!"

"You are a prisoner, and, as such, deprived of freedom of movement. I can't let you go."

"Great guns! you don't mean ter say I must go back ter that cell, do yer?"

"For the present, yes. I cannot be guided by my prejudices or beliefs; you are a prisoner, and I have no more right to let you go than I would have if you were accused of murder."

"Oh! oh! oh!"

"Stay! I guess I can help you out. The justice who lives over yonder is a friend of mine, and between him and another friend, who will go on your bond, I think we can get you out on bail."

"Cap, you're a trump! Of course, the due form of events must be follered, an' you will excuse me fer kickin'. Come on, an' let's git the bailin'-machine ter work!"

The captain did not seek to curb Abe's impatience, and the matter was so hurried on that, in due time, the Sharp was formally "bailed out." He was to appear in court that day, and, unless Twiss was there to prefer charges against him, it was certain he would be discharged.

Once at liberty, Abe set out to find Old Grasshopper. At first the fact that the 'longshoreman's residence was unknown was a barrier to success, but by accident a boy was found who was able to tell just where he lived.

The Sharp went there, but the result was disappointing and suggestive.

The 'longshoreman had not been home that night.

"Drowneded in the dock, by mighty!" was Abe's down-hearted, but silent comment; then, saying nothing to alarm the people of the house, he went away, revolving in his mind the very timely question:

"What next?"

He was walking in a slow and thoughtful way, when he chanced upon a youth of his own age whose name was Ike Hilson.

"Hi, Abe!" the other boy called out, "ye ought ter been wid me last night!"

"Had I?" curly returned the Sharp.

"Yes; up ter Pete Glass's house."

"Eh? W'ot about his house?" cried Abe, with sudden interest.

"Why, he took something out of it; I dunno w'ot, only there was quite a scrap over it. Dunno whether the thing was a human or an animal, I don't."

CHAPTER XIV.

TRACING THE KIDNAPPERS.

"Now, see here, Isaac, you ain't talkin' through yer hat, be yer?"

"Naw! W'ot yer givin' us?"

"I'm givin' yer a feed on oranges ef you'll narrate the incidents with veracity an' continuity."

Ahoy Abe had grown interested at once, and he felt that he could afford to make the prodigal proposition to Isaac if he obtained all the facts as an offset. Isaac was of the same mind, and he proceeded to the story.

"Et was like this, ye see: I wuz a-comin' home from my aunt's house, an' I got near where Peter Glass lived. A covered Express wagon stood in front o' the door, with the driver on the box.

"I had crossed the street kinder slantin'-like, an' he didn't see me; an' I stopped by the tail-end o' the wagon ter take a squint in. Et was closed up, though, an' I didn't see anything.

"Jest then there come a sound from the house which made me think o' the menagerie up in Central Park—a kind of a growl, an' scream, an' snort, an' sneeze, an' wuff, an' yowl, all in one."

"Must 'a' been a remarkable sound," Abe gravely commented.

"Et was; an' it scared me. I didn't want no animal which might be half bear, half wildcat, half rattlesnake, half eagle, an' half Harlem goat, ter drop on me, so I went ter a doorway a few houses below an' kinder secreted myself fer a watch where I could likewise sneak, ef occasion demanded."

"Wal, I heerd a few more yowls from the Glass house, but dimmer than t'others, an' I was jest thinkin' there was goin' ter be no manifestation, when the door opened."

"W'ot then?" Abe demanded, eagerly.

"Sev'ral men come out, bearin' a heavy burden."

"W'ot was it?"

"That's the question I hev been debatin' onter, my friend. Glass hisself was one o' the men—"

"Eh? When was this?"

"Oh, about twelve o'clock."

"B'gosh!"

Abe's mind wandered from the burden for a moment. Glass had been left securely tied up in the old house in Jersey, the previous evening, yet, according to Isaac, he was back in New York at midnight.

"That's straight," the narrator declared. "I know the tout like a book, an' can't be took in on him nohow. Glass et was."

"But w'ot was they carryin'?"

"A thing all sewed up, or bound up, in a thing like a big bag. The snortin' an' growlin' was over, but—oh, 'Liza Maria!—wan't the thing a-squirmin'! He made the bag flop like a sail in a hurricane, an' I sort of expected him ter break loose, but I guess he hadn't the use o' his legs. Anyhow, I didn't see him at all. He was bundled inter the wagon, an' it drove away."

"That's all, but you'd had a pile o' fun ef you'd been with me, Abe."

"Mebbe! Isaac, w'ot d'ye reckon wuz in that bag?"

"Give et up."

"An animal?"

"Don't think so."

"Crazy man?"

"Naw! He wan't that."

"But you said he snarled, an' growled, an' yowled—"

"I may hev exaggerated a bit—jest a bit. Anyhow, there was a scrap up there, an' wild an' woolly shoutin', but et was human, I guess. Most likely Glass an' his heelers biffed the feller an' got his back up. Et would me, ter be biffed."

Ahoy Abe was far more interested than Isaac had expected. It looked as though Glass, strangely liberated in some way from his captivity in the old Jersey house, had removed his prisoner of the closed room guarded by Deborah and Dorcas.

More questions the Sharp asked, anxious to learn who the driver had been, but Isaac could not inform him, so he decided to make an effort to find Parson Joe. The latter was not at home, and Abe saw with strong annoyance that he had got to adjourn everything else in order to go to court.

He went, but, as every one had expected, neither Captain Twiss nor any of his heelers appeared to press the charge against the Sharp. As they had established an unenviable reputation for themselves Abe was discharged, and detectives sent out to try and locate the Brown Bet and her skipper.

It was nearly noon when Abraham found himself at liberty to do as he pleased. His first step was to get something to eat. Then he went again to look for Parson Joe and Old Grasshopper, but found neither.

"Shoot the luck!" he commented, irritably. "I seem ter be at the end o' my rope. Don't know what ter do next, by gum!"

At this juncture Isaac reappeared.

"Say, cully, I'm thinkin' we kin foller that wagon ef we want ter. I've been tellin' me brother about it. He works on a ferry-boat from Forty-second street ter Weehawken, an' he says that same wagon crossed there last night. He seen the bag in the wagon ez he was passin' it on de boat; an' he see Glass, too."

"Headed fer Weehawken, was they?"

"Yes."

"S'pose they could be traced there?"

"I do, dat. Le's try it!"

Isaac was eager to have some excitement,

though he had no clew to the actual in. Abe looked at it only in a practical light. course of the gang, seemed to indicate that they had gone to the old house where he had been put in such peril by Glass, though he could hardly believe they would be so reckless.

Glass must know it was no place of safety.

"Wal, Isaac, I s'pose we might go over."

"Sure! We ain't g't nothin' else ter do, an' I'd just like ter spite Pete Glass. We will have more fun out of it than a Fourth o' July. Come on, old man!"

The speaker's boyish enthusiasm was in marked contrast to the stern purpose which actuated Abe Dow, but the latter knew Isaac was reliable, and was glad to have him along on the trip. He would be of assistance in tracing the wagon, and might be further useful.

Without delay they went to Forty-second street and crossed to Weehawken.

Here came the pinch, for but few persons were likely to have been abroad at the hour of night when the wagon struck Jersey soil. No one then about the ferry-house could give any information, but they were referred to one of the gate-keepers of the night-watch, and to him they went.

Being questioned, he shook his head.

"Don't remember that any strange team come over," he observed.

"But what teams were there?"

"Only a few, of course. The only covered Express I remember was—"

"What? Who?"

"Well, Jimmy Cotter come over, as usual."

"Who is he?"

"He does a general Express in New York, but lives here, and stables his horse here."

"What fer a looker is he?" Isaac interrupted, quickly.

"A young man; about twenty-four, I should say; slender-built but strong; face smooth, but for a small, straw-colored mustache, and wore a gray suit of clothes—"

"That's him; that's the man that drove the team!" Isaac declared. "By jiminy! et's all right, Abe!"

"Where does this Jimmy Cotter live?" Abe asked.

The gateman described the place, adding that Cotter was probably in New York, then, though he did not remember seeing him go over, as usual, that morning. The boys went outside, and Isaac continued so positive that they were on the right track, Abe decided to call where Cotter lived. They went, and the second boy suddenly exclaimed:

"Say, there's the wagon, now!"

The Sharp looked and saw a wagon which certainly did answer the description which Isaac had early given. Much encouraged, they knocked at the door, and the stout woman who appeared made answer to their question:

"No, Jimmy ain't in; though he didn't go to New York to-day. He had a job which kept him out late last night, and he slept all the forenoon. Now he's gone out somewhere, but I don't know where."

She could not suggest any better way of finding Jimmy than to wait for him, but this did not suit the searchers; they wanted more active service. Fortunately, they were put in the way of continuing work.

"Hi!" suddenly broke in a small voice.

"W'ot wuz it Jim carried ter Old Duffy's last night! It squirmed like a snake when they took it up, in the bag. Me brudder said it wuz a dog, but I said it wuz too big. We's got a bet o' ten cigs on wedder it wuz a dog or not. See?"

Before them stood a very small boy who might have been anywhere from four to six years old. His only visible garments were a ragged pair of overalls, a ragged shirt and a ragged hat, but he sported dirt enough to clothe him fully. In his mouth he held the stump of a cigarette, which gave a clew to the nature of the bet mysteriously referred to as "ten cigs."

Abe and Isaac exchanged glances.

All this was very suggestive.

The woman could not settle the important wager, and said so good-humoredly, but the larger boys proceeded to steer the small youth clear of the place and question him.

His name, he said was Bartholomew Shea, and he lived next door to "Old Duffy's." The previous night he and his "brudder" had been awakened by a team which was driven between the two houses, and they had seen a mysterious object in a bag unloaded from Cotter's wagon.

"Me mother said she seen a bloke around de place, to-day, dat she used ter know. His name was Peter Glass. I tried ter light on him, me-silf, but couldn't, an' it depends on Jimmy ter settle de bet I have wid me brudder of de cigs."

"Say, kid, take me ter yer marm!" Abe directed.

"I will, ef you'll give me five cigs."

CHAPTER XV.

THE HERMIT, AND HIS HOUSE.

NEITHER Abe nor Isaac was supplied with the libel on the name of tobacco referred to, but the former offered young Shea ten cents, instead, and the bargain was made. He conducted them as agreed upon, and they took a cautious view of the house in which Shea declared the object in the bag had been landed.

"Old Duffy's" house, like those surrounding it, was old and dilapidated, and dogs and dirt alone appeared to flourish there. As nothing could be seen of interest to the Sharp, he, after learning that the Duffys and the Sheas were not on good terms, decided to go in and see Mrs. Shea.

He went, and found her a good-natured, but ignorant woman. A little talk sufficed to bring out a long complaint against Dom Duffy and his family, after which Abe quietly referred to the events of the past night.

"I know nothing about it," returned Mrs. Shea, "but me kids say de bag was delivered there, an' they wouldn't tell a lie. Sure, de bag may have been innocent enough, but I have me doubts since I saw Pete Glass there, to-day."

"Who is he?" Abe asked, mildly.

"Pete Glass? Sure, he's wan ave the Ould Nick's children. I knew him of ould, an' no good did I know ave him."

"When an' where was this?"

"Bless me! how the question does carry me back to de ould toimes. It was when I was workin' for Hiram Bentley."

The Dock Sharp caught himself just as he was going to utter an exclamation of surprise. Unless there had been two Hiram Bentleys, it was the name of Parson Joe's father, and the same man who had been stabbed in the back by Captain Twiss or one of his followers.

"It's many a long year ago," continued Mrs. Shea. "How well I remember them all—Hiram Bentley, his wife, who died when her last child was a baby, an' de children, Joseph an' Mary."

"What become of them?" Abe asked.

"Bentley died at sea soon after his wife died; then the baby, Mary, died. What became ave Joseph I never knew. There's only wan man I'm sure could tell—though maybe Pete Glass could—an' he won't open his mouth ef torture was applied."

"Who's that?"

"His name is Longley, an' he lives over beyant here. He was on the vessel whin Bentley died. I've always been thinkin' there was strange worruk about de way the master died, but it ain't fer a poor body loike me to sift de matter. Old Longley has been growing older an' uglier, an' he's been a total hermit for these ten years, hated by all."

The Sharp made a mental note of the name. A man who had been on the vessel when Bentley died would prove of interest to Parson Joe—perhaps, also of interest to the police—some time.

"Where does Pete Glass come in?" he asked.

"Longley then owned a trotting-horse, an', as he was away at sea a good deal, he hired Pete—then a young man—to take care of the b'aste. Sure, Pete thought he cut a foine figger ridin' around wid de outfit."

There was that in Mrs. Shea's manner which made Abe suspect she had been Pete's companion in more than one ride, but he did not mention the idea.

"Horses an' dogs an' fast company was the ruination ave Pete," she continued, "an' finally all of his friends had to shake him. He got into wan scrape after another, had to run away until his misdeeds blowed over, an' thin come back an' did worse than iver. They do say he's a horse-tout now, an' where could yez find a meaner trade?"

Mrs. Shea's mind seemed to run more upon Peter Glass than anything else, but when Abe brought her back to the Bentley family, she answered willingly enough, but without giving more light.

She had worked for them, but knew very little about them, really.

While they were talking, her hopeful son re-entered.

"Say, old woman," he remarked, "de bloke dat you said was Pete Glass has just left Old Duffy's an' is goin' up de road."

"Let him go!"

"He seems ter have business on his hands."

"Goin' ter see old Longley, mebbe."

This careless remark from Mrs. Shea set Abe to thinking. If Glass was finding himself cor-

nered, and his sudden removal to New Jersey indicated that state of affairs, was it not possible that he would seek Longley as one likely to be of service in his hour of need?

The Sharp winked to Isaac, and then said they must go. He received a cordial invitation to call again, the attentive way in which he had listened while the lady talked having won her good-will.

From her direction the boys had no trouble in finding Longley's house. It was small, and but a trifle more prepossessing than the rookeries occupied by the Sheas and the Duffys. Thus far nothing had been seen of Glass, though they had followed his tracks easily in the dusty road.

As Isaac was a stranger Abe now sent him ahead to pass the house, loiter a little, and then return; all the while giving heed to the footprints, and making sure whether they led into Longley's yard.

Isaac went, and returned in due time.

"Caged!" he remarked.

"The tracks turned inter Longley's, eh?"

"Yes, an' so did Glass."

"Looks like et."

"I seen him there."

"Oh! did yer?"

"Yes; he was at an upper winder, chinnin' with somebody. I couldn't see the other one, but I understood Dame Shea ter say Longley lived alone, so I guess et was him. 'Cording ter all appearances I should say Peter has sought his old friend. Eh?"

"Yes."

Abe spoke absently. He was wondering if the present case was not a good one in which to bring certain matters to a crisis. Glass was in consultation with a man who, report said, had been knowing to the death of Hiram Bentley. More than this, it seemed possible to unfold the mystery of the object brought from New York in the bag, if the proper means could be used.

"Ike," he suddenly added, "will you go back ter New York on an errand fer me?"

"Thunder!—jest ez things are warm'n' up?" returned Isaac, in dismay.

"Parson Joe, the sport, would want ter be here the worst way ef he knew the sattervation, an' I'll bet he would pay you well ef you'd go ter him, tell him about it, an' lead him here."

Isaac liked excitement, but he also liked money, and this proposition impressed him so forcibly that he first thought of it seriously and then decided to go. He had a few words more with his friend, and then hastened away followed by Abe's parting injunction:

"Go it, Ike, an' don't let yer legs grow moss on the way. Hustle yer liveliest, an' tell Parson Joe that I say he's wanted here, bad!"

Left alone the Sharp continued his watch, but it was soon interrupted by the reappearance of Peter Glass. He came out looking irritated and angry, but by the time he passed Abe's ambush his mood had changed to one of milder, more thoughtful fashion, and he appeared to be struggling with some weighty problem.

"Guess he was knocked out on some plan, in there," was the Sharp's ready surmise.

Glass went on, and the watcher soon saw him disappear in "Old Duffy's" rookery. This left Abe without any employment. Isaac was speeding for New York, but it would be a long time before he would return. The sun was beginning to cast long shadows as it neared the horizon; night was close at hand.

The more the Sharp looked at the house in front of him the more he became possessed of a desire to know more about its occupant.

What was Longley like?

According to Mrs. Shea he was a man with a dark record, and Abe had a vague idea that he must have been a genuine pirate. Of pirates the boy had often heard, but never having seen any of the fraternity, he was curious to know how they looked. Longley, as a possible pirate and a known participant in the Bentley tragedy, had a fascination for Abe.

"B'gosh!" he suddenly decided, "I'm goin' ter call on him. Glass come out lookin' ugly. That shows he didn't get w'ot he wanted. Longley went back on him. Good! I'll see Longley, an' find out ef the pirate has reformed."

The decision did not seem to be of the wisest nature, but the Sharp straightway marched to the house and knocked.

No one answered.

He repeated the summons, but failed to get much noise out of it, as he had to rely upon his knuckles, and the door was solid. After some further delay he decided that knocking was a waste of time. If Longley was a hermit it was not likely he would answer any such sum-

mons, and if Glass had been able to come and go freely, why could not others do the same?

Again acting upon a reckless impulse, the Sharp opened the door and entered. His first view of the interior was in the nature of a surprise.

He saw a good-sized hall, the floor of which which was uncarpeted, and where there was no furniture, but, instead, a dozen rocks, some of them weighing nearly two hundred pounds, were scattered about. This was peculiar, but if Abe had opened the doors leading from the hall he would have found the same state of affairs there—rocks were everywhere.

It was not until some time after that he learned that Longley never had furnished the lower floor at all, and, objecting to the noise every trifling occurrence made in the vacant rooms, he had filled them with rocks to deaden sound.

Now, after looking awhile at the singular "furniture," he went up-stairs. He was resolved to walk in boldly upon Longley, but as he paused at the head of the stairs, he heard footsteps on the walk outside the house.

Hurrying to the window he looked out. What he saw gave him a shock.

The pedestrian was Captain John Twiss!

"Great Scott!" the Sharp exclaimed, "he's come ter see Longley!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SHARP GETS OLD-TIME HISTORY.

AHOY ABE'S discovery was, at first, something of a shock, for Captain Twiss had made his reputation as a hard fighter, and the Sharp was not foolish enough to suppose he could worst the mariner in an equal fight, but it soon occurred to him that there might be no need of an encounter.

He had not yet revealed himself to Longley, and if Twiss came in at once, all previous sounds might possibly be ascribed to him; and this would give the Sharp a chance to listen while the captain talked with his old-time associate.

"Jim-hickey! I guess I'm still in it!" was Abe's exultant comment.

Twiss did not pause to rap. He entered, and, after a little hesitation, came up the stairs. Abe crouched back in a corner and trusted to the darkness to screen his small form from observation.

For a moment Twiss paused and looked around, and then opened a door. He closed it at once, and then went to another. This he opened, and at once entered.

"Hallo, Longley!" he exclaimed, bluffly.

He had pushed the door to behind him, but it had failed to latch, and a slight crevice was left, unknown to him; a fact very much in the Sharp's favor.

There was a long pause, and then a low, hoarse voice sullenly answered:

"Why has Satan, your master, sent you here?"

"Come, old comrade, that's not an amiable way to receive a friend," Twiss remonstrated.

"Friend!" echoed the other, sarcastically.

"You and I are villains, John Twiss, but we need not be hypocrites."

"Really, I have the very best of feeling for you."

"What favor do you want?" was the brusque interruption.

"Favor?"

"Yes. Flattery and wheedling always precede the introduction of a selfish end."

Ahoy Abe had ventured to push the door open a little more, and this enabled him to get sight of the second speaker. It was, of course, Longley, and he very well fitted Abe's fancy of calling him an ex-pirate. The man was in bed, well propped up with pillows, and it needed no wise looker to discover that it was a bed of sickness.

Once Longley had been an athletic man, but age and infirmities had come upon him. The flesh had gone from his limbs and person, leaving the big bones and muscles very prominent, and the blood seemed to have gone, too.

His rough, gnarled, scarred face was colorless—almost as much so as the stiff hair and long beard which framed it in, and they were quite white.

Plainly, the hand of death was upon him, and in that hour only his eyes retained the light and likeness of life. They were bright and piercing, and they aided his face to form an expression of sarcasm and great cunning.

"Longley, you wrong me!" Twiss declared. "I have come as a friend, to visit an old comrade. As soon as Pete Glass told me you were ill I hastened here—"

"To see me die?"

"To offer my regrets and—my aid."

"Rot! Glass came as a spy and scout. He wanted a favor of me, but found me too sick to be of use even to a homeless dog. Now, you come. Why? What new villainy are you studying up?"

"Longley, you are exasperating."

"And you are as big a fool as ever."

The men regarded each other in silence for a moment. Unbelief and sarcasm were prominent on the one hand; on the other—well, Ahoy Abe could see little in Twiss's expression now to bear witness to the good will he had professed.

"You are as ungracious a cur as ever!" the captain suddenly exclaimed.

"I know mankind," was the philosophical response.

"You have lived long."

"Seventy-four years. Yes, yes; it's a long life."

"Some would say you have outlived your usefulness."

"To you, I have. I can no longer pull at an anchor or sail, and card-playing in a ship's cabin would suit me less than of yore."

Twiss looked around nervously.

"Hush!" he exclaimed.

Longley laughed mockingly.

"Touches you in a tender spot, don't it? In imagination I see again a 'hand composed of four queens and the ace of diamonds. I held four jacks and a ten-spot. I thought I could win, and my opponent was planning to scoop the pile and leave the cabin. You saw that he held better cards than I, and knew that he would win. We wished to clean him out at poker, for we feared if he died any other way it would prove his cash was hidden where we could not find it; but a look at his hand showed you the risk was going the wrong way, so you played a trump card, if you were not in the game. You played it in his back—so!"

Feebly Longley imitated a blow with a knife.

Several times Twiss had tried to check him, but in vain. Sullenly he now regarded the dying man.

"How often has your tongue babbled this?" he asked.

"Never! Do I want to be hanged?"

"I don't trust you, Robert Longley!"

"I know you don't, and I dare say you have come here to finish me up as you did the man in the cabin. You say I've outlived my usefulness, and that's a suggestive remark from you. Well, if you think best to murder me it will be no loss to any one."

"Longley," spoke Twiss, scarcely heeding the last words, "I think we are in danger; ay, I know it!"

Longley smiled calmly.

"Danger has no terrors for me."

"Because you will never leave the bed you lie upon. It is different with me; I have a future, and am obliged to protect myself. Longley, you remember the man who would not swear secrecy, and whom we threw overboard when—when—Well, you understand."

"Yes; when we turned pirates."

"Hush!"

"Well, what of Hugh Flood?"

"He still lives."

"Impossible!"

"It is true. He lives, and has been in New York for some time. How much, or how little, he has said I know not, but he has been leading the alleged life of a 'longshoreman, in the city. He has worked but rarely, and none of his associates know anything of him. What name he gave when he branched out in his present calling I have not learned; the name became lost to recollection, and he is known only as Old Grasshopper!"

"Ah!" breathed Ahoy Abe.

"It seems almost impossible," remarked Longley, seriously. "Cast overboard in mid-ocean, how could he have escaped?"

"I don't know, but escape he did. He is now hunting me down!"

"Ha! and is your crime to be avenged after so long a while?"

"He is hunting me," Twiss went on gloomily.

"Twice, of late, I have seen his work. First, I found in the cabin of my schooner a tableau representing that game of cards; a show so accurate that each of the two players, you and the man who died, held the very cards you then held, while I stood erect, peering into his hand, and holding my dagger ready. But the figures representing these players, and myself, were human skeletons, neatly strung together, bone by bone, with wire. Remember Hugh Flood's skill and hobby in that line, in old days, and

think how my suspicions at once rose, even though I thought him dead. But I soon learned he was alive, and then I knew he was *hunting me down!*"

"Flood, not dead!" muttered Longley, thoughtfully.

"He is fatally alive."

"Bad for you!"

"His second warning was a coffin which he managed to introduce to my cabin. It was empty, but it had a silver plate on it inscribed with my name and the words, 'Died, July 27, 1888.'"

"Ha! he give you less than a week of life."

"Yes."

"Look out for him! That man was devoted to his friends on the vessel, and his courage was as unwavering as that of a lion. Think how he chose to be thrown overboard rather than swear allegiance to us! A man of iron, he! Captain, you are doomed; Hugh Flood will kill you like a dog!"

"I fear that less than—"

"What?"

"Arrest!"

Twiss moved nervously, and then added:

"Every movement of that man suggests that he would not be satisfied merely to kill me; he wants to subject me to the horror, the uncertainty, the wearing suspense of imprisonment, trial, sentence, the dread of legal doom, death. A veritable fiend, he is. His deformity always made him unpleasant to look at; now it gives me such a shock that it is worse than a nightmare. I know not when he will strike—know not at what moment he may be creeping upon me!"

"Truly, you are to be pitied!" sneered Longley.

"Yet," added Twiss, suddenly becoming practical, "he will find it hard to *prove* anything unless you turn against me."

"Ah! I see now why you come to me!" quickly interrupted the sick man.

"I did come to know if I can rely upon you to remain silent."

"Suppose I see fit to tell all."

"Would you do that?"

"Suppose I say, yes?"

Twiss did not answer, but his hands closed and his facial expression became most threatening and cruel.

Longley laughed.

"So!" he commented; "it all comes out like matter of a printed book. Unless I swear silence, and perhaps that would not save me, you will kill me before you leave here."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HUNT GROWS HOT.

CAPTAIN TWISS did not answer, but his looks bore testimony to the truth of Longley's surmise—for it was true.

The captain saw himself hunted to the wall, and he knew not which way to turn to escape doom, but all his brute-like courage rose to urge him on to resistance.

But in the now dying companion of former days he saw an enemy more to be dreaded than Old Grasshopper, simply because the accusation of the one could be proven by the testimony of the other.

Longley must never corroborate the charge.

Realizing suddenly that his silence was giving assent to Longley's words, the captain answered:

"I have too much faith in you as an old comrade to believe you would betray me."

"Bravely said," the sick man sneered, "but you coquette with the truth. You believe nothing of the kind. For years you and I have held no love for one another. At any time you would be glad to send me to the gallows. Why should I love you more than you love me?"

"Man, would you betray me?"

Fierce was the captain's manner, and his voice was almost as hoarse as the dying man's; but Longley smiled in a slow, contemptuous way:

"There is no honor among murderers."

The captain took a forward step, his manner growing more threatening, but Longley's smile did not disappear.

"Let no consideration for me stay you," he advised. "My life is not worth anything, and the suffering I have undergone the last few weeks has satisfied me. Your hands are big and strong; strangle me, if you will!"

But Twiss did not stir. The willingness of the dying man served to make him waver, and he hesitated. Was there a trap in this? Would any human being be so willing? Did the old

man have friends near who would interfere at the proper moment, and seize him in the act of committing the crime?

Ahoy Abe watched with painful interest. He did not intend to let Longley die thus, if he could prevent it. The man and his knowledge were too valuable to be lost thus.

It was a painful pause to all but the sick man while Twiss stood hesitating, but it was broken at last. It was too much for any murderer to think that by one bold move he could crush the life out of the man he had to fear most.

He leaped forward and seized Longley by the throat, but the movement was followed by the forward motion of one of the latter's hands, and a keen knife pierced the captain's arm.

He recoiled, more from surprise than fear, and blood trickled down over his hand. Again Longley laughed.

"The race is not always to the fleet!" he scoffed.

"You shall die, dog!" Twiss hissed, and again he leaped upon his victim.

With one hand he shut off all chance for Longley to utter a word; with the other he pinioned that person's knife-hand. If the old man had relied upon the knife to save him he had counted on a frail support; he struggled, but his strength was no more than a child's, and Twiss was resistless.

"Die! die!" the assassin hissed.

Longley was near to his end.

Ahoy Abe knew the time had come for him to act. He could not hope for aid, and must rely wholly upon himself, it seemed, but the fast-gathering darkness would hide the fact that he was so young, and he relied much upon getting the mariner into a panic.

Entering the room very lightly, he twisted his leg around the captain's, tripping him neatly, and the latter fell to the floor with a crash.

Then the rescuer caught up the knife which had fallen from Longley's nerveless hand.

"Bring in the handcuffs!" Abe shouted, assuming a deep voice. "Don't let him escape! Shoot him if he tries to pass yer!"

It was a shrewd trick, but did not work as it had been planned. Twiss managed to regain his feet, and his face was full of fury.

"Shoot me, will you?" he hissed. "Well, I'll make it hot for you before I go under."

And he leaped toward the Dock Sharp.

Abe was not reckless enough to covet a grapple with a man twice his size, and he neatly dodged. Then he cried out again:

"Put one man under the winders, and cut off every way of escape!"

It seemed to be breath thrown away, for Twiss turned again and moved rapidly to the attack. The Sharp found himself in close quarters. He was not willing to run and desert Longley, nor was he capable of conquering Twiss unless victory came by accident.

Again he tried to dodge, but, this time, the mariner succeeded in catching his sleeve and holding him.

"Now, I'll do you up!" Twiss hissed.

His powerful hand closed over Abe's throat, and knowing his life was at stake, the boy swung up the knife for a stroke. But at that moment there was a shout, the sound of trampling feet, and into the room rushed other men. Abe tried to call for help, but could frame no word.

But one of the new-comers leaped upon Twiss and struck him several powerful blows, the sailor released his hold and staggered back. His course was toward the door, and as he saw the way of escape open, he improved the chance at once, for he fled.

One of the new-comers grasped Abe's arm. The Sharp recognized Old Grasshopper.

"Who was it?" the 'longshoreman hissed.

"Captain Twiss, and—"

The deformed man's hold relaxed; he turned and started in pursuit, and, a moment later, was to be heard going down the stairs with long bounds. Instinctively the Sharp started to join in the pursuit, but again he was checked, this time by a gentler hand.

"Remain here," urged a voice.

"Hullo! is it you, Parson Joe?"

"Yes. This old man—is he dead?" and the sport pointed to Longley.

"Dunno, b'gosh! but he hadn't ought ter be. Ef he is it's 'cause he was so feeble an' couldn't stand the shock. Where's there a lamp?"

The speaker was looking around anxiously, but it was not until he had made some search that he found the article named. Parson Joe had a match, and a light was duly obtained.

"Dead, sure-pop!"

Such was Abe's off-hand comment when he

light sight of Longley, but Joe moved forward and felt of his pulse and heart.

"Not dead," he amended, "but in a swoon. He is in a very feeble condition, but I think—I hope he will not die without regaining consciousness. Bring me water, quickly!"

The sport hung over the wreck of the old pirate with as much solicitude as if he were the dearest of kin, and when the water was brought, proceeded to use it skillfully. In every way he showed that he was deeply concerned in Longley's future.

For the old man of crime Abe cared nothing except that he was eager to see Parson Joe win, but the thought of Old Grasshopper in active pursuit of Twiss was fascinating. He went to the window and looked out, and finally remarked:

"Say, ef you kin spare me, mebbe I'd better go an' see ef I kin give our pard a lift."

"Go, by all means. I don't need you here. See to it that no trick is worked upon the 'longshoreman.'"

No second bidding was necessary, and the Dock Sharp was soon outside the house. He could not see any one, but it seemed natural for Twiss to head for Old Duffy's, where Glass was supposed to be, so the young investigator went that way.

On his arrival in the vicinity he saw two dark figures close together, but, speedily recognizing them as Isaac and young Shea, he joined them.

"Anything goin' on?" he asked.

"Say, I met Parson Joe down by the ferry, with Old Grasshopper, and when I began ter tell them, Joe said as how they was goin' on that very errand," explained Isaac, hurriedly; "an' they went. An' now Shea, here, has sneaked inter Duffy's, an' he says the thing w'ot was in the bag was a man!"

"Yes, siree!" declared Shea. "I seen him. Now, you give me seven cigs fer dat, 'cause et's worth it. You kin go in de same way I did, an' git all de primers you want. He's a pris'n'r, an'—"

"Show me the way," the Dock Sharp interrupted, "an' I'll go in like a cyclone. Hustle!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

FINAL SURPRISES.

THE tough small boy did not need any urging, and their movements screened by the darkness, he led the way to the rear of the Duffy house.

"Guess Pete Glass an' de rest o' de gang is out," he explained, "so you's don't need ter be very careful. Well, you kin climb up on dat shed, an' den go right in de windy. See?"

Ahoy Abe "saw," and he proceeded to act. The climbing was easy, and he soon arrived at the window. The apology for a curtain was down, but the sash was up, and he easily moved the former. In the darkness he could see nothing, but a voice sounded at his elbow.

"Here's a blinker!" and young Shea put forward a lighted lantern.

"Dat will be ten more cigs," he explained.

Abe seized the lantern and held it boldly forward in the room, anxious to work while he could. First of all he saw a long, bag-like affair on the floor, but it held his attention only a moment. Beyond was a blanket spread on the floor, and on this lay a man. He was bound and tied to a post, and a cloth covered his mouth, but Abe saw his gaze turned upon them.

Acting on a sudden impulse the Dock Sharp entered the room and went to the man's side. Quickly he tore off the bandage on the captive's face.

"General, be as mum as a mice!" he cautioned. "One squeal from you will put ye in a condemn'd fix."

He looked anxiously at the man as he spoke, for he was not yet sure whether he was in his right mind or insane, but the question was settled quickly.

"In Heaven's name, free me from my bonds!" the unknown urged, eagerly.

"Mister, who be you, anyhow?"

"My name is Hiram Bentley!"

"What?"

A nervous start accompanied the question. Abe recognized the name of a man said to be dead, the victim of John Twiss and his knife. Was this a false claimant?

"Cut my bonds!" added the prisoner, hurriedly. "The enemy are liable to come at any moment. Release me, and you shall be well rewarded."

It was the voice and manner of a sane man, and the Dock Sharp hesitated no longer. With a few movements of his knife he cut the re-

straining cords, and the stranger leaped to his feet.

"Thank Heaven!" he exclaimed. "Now, let us get away."

He turned toward the window, but at that moment the door abruptly opened. A man stood on the threshold—Peter Glass!

The tout paused and looked in amazement and consternation. With his captive free and Ahoy Abe there he was not slow to surmise the truth, and a desperate resolve was expressed in his face. His hand moved back to his hip-pocket.

"Run!" Abe cried, addressing the rescued man.

But the latter had the memory of many wrongs to fire his blood, and he saw a better way than to flee in the face of a revolver. Grasping a chair he swung it up, and, with one swinging stroke, brought it down on Glass's head. The latter did not succeed in interposing so much as a hand; he received the full force of the blow, and sunk senseless to the floor.

Once more the way of retreat was open, and the chance was not neglected. Using the window, Abe and the rescued man were soon on the ground.

As they reached that point, Bartholomew Shea uttered a warning cry as another figure appeared, but Abe cried out in relief:

"Old Grasshopper!"

The 'longshoreman' came up, but he looked only at the late captive. His gaze was most intense.

"Who are you?" he asked, deeply.

"My name is Hiram Bentley—"

"Don't you know me?"

"You?"

"Go back to the ship where a certain man was stabbed in the back. Remember a deformed person on board who—"

"Great heavens! can it be Hugh Flood?" cried Bentley.

"Ay, and no one else!"

The reputed stern 'longshoreman' fell upon his knees and pressed Bentley's hands to his lips—an example of old-time homage to be expected in later days only from a man as peculiar as he.

"I thought you dead," murmured Bentley, almost incredulous still.

"I was thrown overboard at sea by the arch-villain who won the ship, but I was not to die thus. I clung to a plank which Providence put in my way, and was finally picked up by another vessel. But you, master—I thought you dead until lately."

"Our enemy put me ashore on a lonely island. I found there one man, a sailor who had been wrecked a month before; and his company kept me from going mad in the dreary years that followed. We found enough to eat. Finally we were rescued, but I came home only to fall into the hands of Peter Glass. He has held me prisoner, bound, and with a bandage always over my mouth, so that when I tried to call for help I produced only discordant cries, unlike a human being. But our enemy—what of him?"

"Dead! Dead to-night, by my hand. He tried to escape; I pursued him; we fought, and he was slain."

"Do yer mean Captain Twiss?" asked Abe, eagerly.

"So he has called himself, of late. His real name was John Damon. Nearly twenty years ago he turned pirate on board a ship commanded by the real Captain Twiss, and he stabbed the latter in the back as Twiss was playing cards with one Robert Longley, the second man. It was a genuine act of mutiny. Only Master Bentley and I refused to swear allegiance to the pirates, and you have heard what Damon did with us. Then he, Damon, assumed the name of John Twiss, and has ever since gone by it. Drusilla, only sister of the real John Twiss, had married Hiram Bentley, and, though she was deceased, Bentley, of course, was true to Twiss. So was I, Bentley's servant."

"And my children, Hugh—my children?" questioned Bentley, eagerly.

"You shall see Joseph, your son, this hour."

"Thank Heaven! But my baby girl?"

"Damon, as Captain Twiss, has reared her to womanhood. As she was too young to remember anything, he changed her name from Mary Bentley to Elise Allen!"

"But, where is she?"

"Safe in New York. Only last night Twiss sent his present vessel, the Brown Bet, away in charge of his mate, but the crew, knowing something was wrong, rebelled. They put back to New York. Your son, Joseph and I saw them, and put Mary where she would be safe; then I,

having got a clew to your whereabouts, brought Joseph here. You must see him. But, Master Bentley, he does not yet know you are alive. He has always thought you dead, and he wrongly believes it was you who was stabbed in the back by your old enemy. All this must be explained to him."

"B'jinks! et looks ter me as ef this tangle is straightened out," commented Ahoy Abe, with relief.

"Victory is surely ours," Old Grasshopper agreed. "Now, Master Bentley, let us go to your son."

"Ikey, you an' me will stay here. While the rest are jublatin', let us stand on guard."

And Ahoy Abe turned a hand-spring.

Longley recovered from his swoon, but died two days later. Before the end he made a full confession of the old-time crime.

The false Captain Twiss was buried where he died. Glass died of a fractured skull and shock, the result of Bentley's blow, but the death of both men was deemed justifiable, and their slayers never were brought to trial.

It was learned that Glass's release from the old house had been made by Twiss.

The Bentley family, reunited, were happy. It was hard for Mary, or Elise, to realize that she owned another name, but for Bentley and Joseph—"Parson Joe" no longer—her father and brother, she soon conceived admiration and love.

Old Grasshopper assumed his real name, went with the Bentleys to live in Brooklyn, and was seen along the docks no more.

Ahoy Abe and Isaac were duly rewarded, and the reward of the water-front walker was no trivial one. He had been brave, faithful, and of great service, and Joseph was not the man to neglect such a helper; so the Dock Sharp, too, had cause to rejoice.

THE END.

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